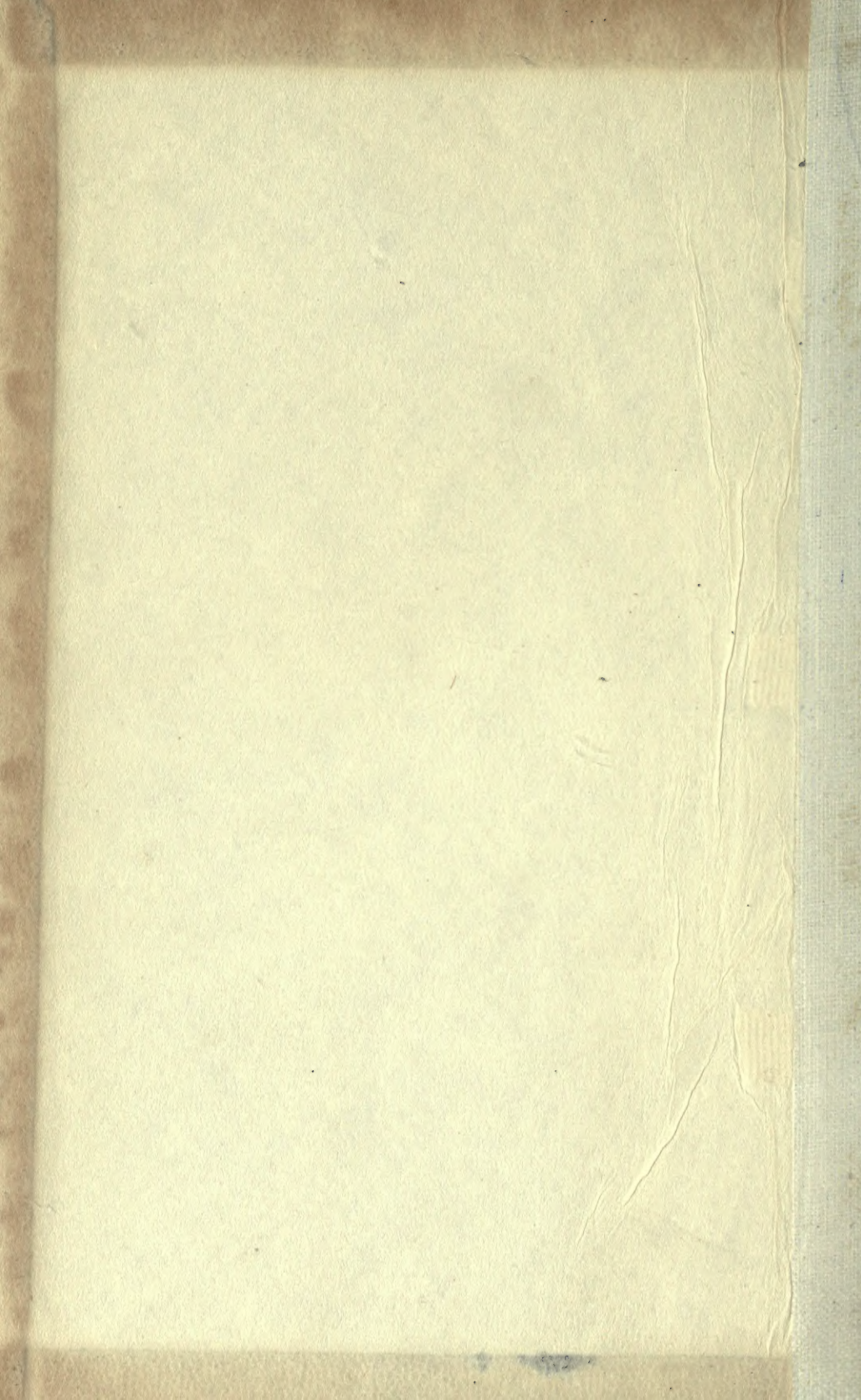



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THE LAST DAYS OF THE  
FRENCH MONARCHY

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LIT DE JUSTICE.

*From 'Tableaux historiques de la Révolution française.'*



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III

# The Last Days of the French Monarchy

By  
Sophia H. MacLehose  
Author of "Tales from Spenser"



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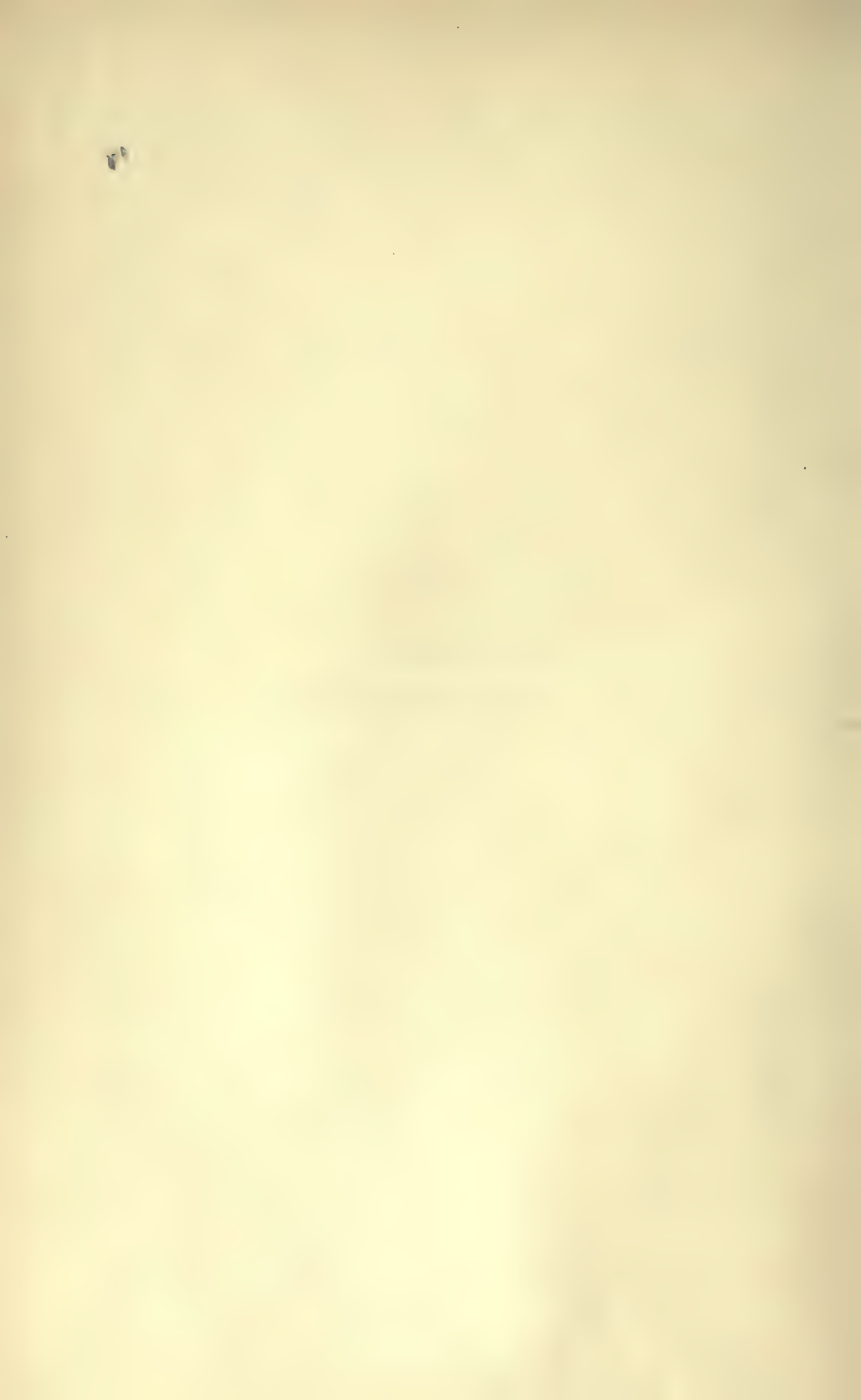


THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

1827



TO THE MEMORY OF  
MY FATHER AND MOTHER





## PREFACE.

IN the following pages I have attempted to give such a sketch of the events preceding the French Revolution as shall enable the reader to approach the more important histories with interest and intelligence. The great prose poem of Carlyle takes much for granted, and to the proper understanding of such works as that of Mr. Morse Stephens some familiarity with the older court and political life of France is desirable. There is abundant material from which to gather this information, but no simple yet detailed account, and it is with the hope of supplying the want that I venture to publish this volume.

References throughout the text, and a list of the books consulted, with full titles of the editions used, are given to enable readers to turn for themselves to the acknowledged authorities. In the case of pamphlets belonging to the British Museum collections, now fully catalogued by Mr. Fortescue, Keeper of the Printed Books—to whose great courtesy and kindness I am much indebted—I have added the

press-marks, as search in the catalogues is a matter of time and experience.

This volume ends when the French Monarchy was on the point of losing its old characteristics. With the promise, in August 1788, of the Convocation of the States-General for the following May, the days of the old regime ended, and a new order began. In another volume I hope to trace the events between 1788 and 1792, which led to the declaration of a Republic on the 22nd of September, 1792.

SOPHIA H. MACLEHOSE.

GLASGOW, *September*, 1901.



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THE LAST DAYS OF THE  
FRENCH MONARCHY





## CHAPTER I.

### A ROYAL TOWN.



LOUIS XIV.

THE reign of Louis XVI. began under a system of government in which laws were made by the sovereign without consent of the people, and ended in one in which the laws were made by the people and only sanctioned by the sovereign.

It began in a state of society where men bowed down before the table at which the king ate and the bed on which he lay, and ended in one under which the king was stripped of all distinctions and called plain Citizen Capet. "After us the deluge," was the spirit in which Louis XV. ended his reign, but the deluge did not come all at once. Louis XVI. had reigned for fifteen years before the gates lifted and let in the

flood which was to sweep the old regime away. To indicate what the old regime was, and how its hold on the French mind had slackened so that the summoning of the States General in 1789 should be the signal for its fall, is the aim of the following chapters.

From the days of Louis XIV. until October, 1789, Versailles held all that was most distinctive of the old regime, that regime which acted as if the people existed for the sovereign rather than for themselves. In its palace was kept up the extravagant show and wearisome etiquette which served to separate the king, in the minds of his subjects and in his own mind, from any other man in France. From its offices were issued the orders which, down to the minutest detail, "in the king's name," governed France.

The town indeed was a royal town, existing mainly for the palace. It had no corporate life of its own, but was governed by a noble appointed by the king, who selected and paid every official employed in the public service of Versailles.<sup>1</sup> Its police were the soldiers who guarded the palace—it had no town-officers and no town-hall, and it might not light its own streets at its own expense without the permission of its governor.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Leroi, *État de Versailles avant 1789*.

<sup>2</sup> Leroi, *Histoire de Versailles*, vol. i. p. ix. and vol. ii. p. 398.

In front of the palace is a great open space then known as the Place d'Armes. On its right, as one faces the palace, lies the parish of Notre-Dame, on its left the parish of St. Louis. It was the meeting-place of town and court; through it rolled royal carriages, across it plodded the traffic of Versailles. There troops were manœuvred and reviews held; indeed, so busy and so dangerous was the Place d'Armes, that a pavement, a thing as yet unknown in Paris, was railed off for the safety of foot-passengers. From it three great roads branch out; these are the Avenue de Sceaux, the Avenue de St. Cloud, and the central Avenue de Paris.

Travellers in France towards the end of the eighteenth century remark on the very small amount of traffic seen on the French high roads.<sup>1</sup> They compare it with English traffic and wonder at the contrast; but they always except the near neighbourhood of Paris, and especially the high-way between Paris and Versailles. There, on the wide Avenue de Paris, passed to and fro the massive chariots of the nobles who served at court. They had rooms in the palace, or *hôtels* close by, but the homes of most were in the capital.

The princes of the blood, the cousins of the king, lived in Paris. There was the Duc d'Orléans in the Palais Royal, the Prince de Conti in the Temple,

<sup>1</sup> See Arthur Young, *Travels in France*.



the Duc de Condé in the Palais Bourbon. These, driving in heavily gilded carriages, large enough to hold six people, drawn by six horses, and dashing always at full speed, were constantly to be seen on the great road to Versailles. There also were the elegant *calèches*, lined with velvet and almost wholly made of glass, in which drove the ladies of the court. By the carriages ran servants dressed in liveries which cost more than a hundred pounds, and with them ran great Danish dogs.

Ambassadors hurried from the capital to the court every Tuesday morning.<sup>1</sup> Judges and lawyers in sober carriages drove from the Palais de Justice, where sat the supreme law-courts, to the Palace of Versailles, where dwelt the law-giver of France.

Up and down this road with reckless speed, a danger and a terror to the foot-passenger, dashed the then fashionable *cabriolet*. The gentleman drove, and his servant sat behind and shouted, "*Gare, gare*" (beware). He generally shouted a little too late. "The master," says a writer of the day, "knocks you down, the valet cries himself hoarse, and you pick yourself up as best you may."<sup>2</sup>

In sharp contrast with the splendour, speed, and comfort that marked the aristocratic equipages were the miserable *fiacres* which the bourgeois were obliged

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 434.

<sup>2</sup> Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, vol. i. p. 120.

to hire. Hideous conveyances they were, and most uncomfortable! The seats slanted so that it was difficult not to slide off, their windows were often boarded up with wood, their wheels had a habit of coming to grief, and they were so dirty that a lady in a light dress entered at her peril. They were dragged by worn-out, half-starving hacks; ragged coachmen, whose civility depended on the time of day and whose speed on their lack of sobriety, charged what they chose, for outside the barriers the coachman was despotic.<sup>1</sup>

A public conveyance ran between Paris and Versailles, and it still further raised the price of the *fiacres*, for there was a law which exacted a fee for permission to use the king's highways except in private carriages or as he had himself provided. He had not provided very well. Mercier describes the *carrabas* or coach which ran between Paris and Versailles. It was, he says, a long, dirty, cage-like thing, in which twenty people were crowded together to breathe foul air during six and a half hours, though well-fed horses, such as the nobles owned for quick travelling—*enragés* they were called—could accomplish the double distance in one hour and a half.

A miserable journey it must have been; badly-fitting canvas was the only protection from wind or

<sup>1</sup> Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, vol. i. p. 152.

rain. The heavy wheels jolted awkwardly; the springs groaned; and the horses, six or four in number, with mended harness and shabby drivers, plodded on at lumbering pace. Yet the royal *fleur-de-lys* was painted on its door, and the coachman's rags were blue, for he was a servant of the king and drove a conveyance of the Royal Messageries.

Those who travelled thus to Versailles passed by the handsome *hôtels* where lived the nobles, and found their way to small streets hidden away in the back parts of the town. These were often invaded by the needs of royalty. The Limousin workpeople, for example, brought from Limoges to make the fine muslin known as *batiste de Versailles*, huddled together in small space, and shut in by gates, were finally dispossessed to make room for kennels. Near the churches—in quiet streets still picturesque and interesting—lived the middle classes, the bourgeois of Versailles. The Rue St. Honoré was one of these. Here, in No. 15, lived the physician, Dr. Guillotin, whose deadly invention was to earn so wide a fame.<sup>1</sup>

Near the houses of the nobility, and in close connection with the palace, was a street, Rue de la Surintendance, now called Rue de la Bibliothèque, in which were the offices of the Departments of State.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Leroi, *Histoire de Versailles*, vol. ii. p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. ii. p. 147 *seq.*



The ministers at the head of each department had their rooms in a wing of the palace which looked on to a court called, after them, Cour des Ministres, but their subordinates, their clerks and under-clerks, did their work in the Rue de la Surintendance. In it was the Foreign Office, an old-world building—now used as a public library—on whose walls hung portraits of all the sovereigns in Europe and in Asia with whom the Court of Versailles had relations. There, too, was the War Office, with models of every fortress in France; the Office of the Marine, and that of the Controller of Finance.

In this same block of buildings (entering from the Rue St. Julien) stood and still stands the Post Office—a shabby old building with dreary shed-like offices.<sup>1</sup> It was well placed amongst the Government Bureaus, for in the days of the old regime the office of *Poste aux Lettres* at Versailles was meant for more than the mere dispatch and delivery of letters. It was a source of secret information to the king, almost a branch of the secret police. For Louis XIV. and his successors often read their subjects' letters, and the practice was even taken advantage of by courtiers in disgrace who could not easily gain the king's ear. Knowing that any letter of theirs committed to the ordinary post was sure to be read, they expressed opinions and gave vent to feelings

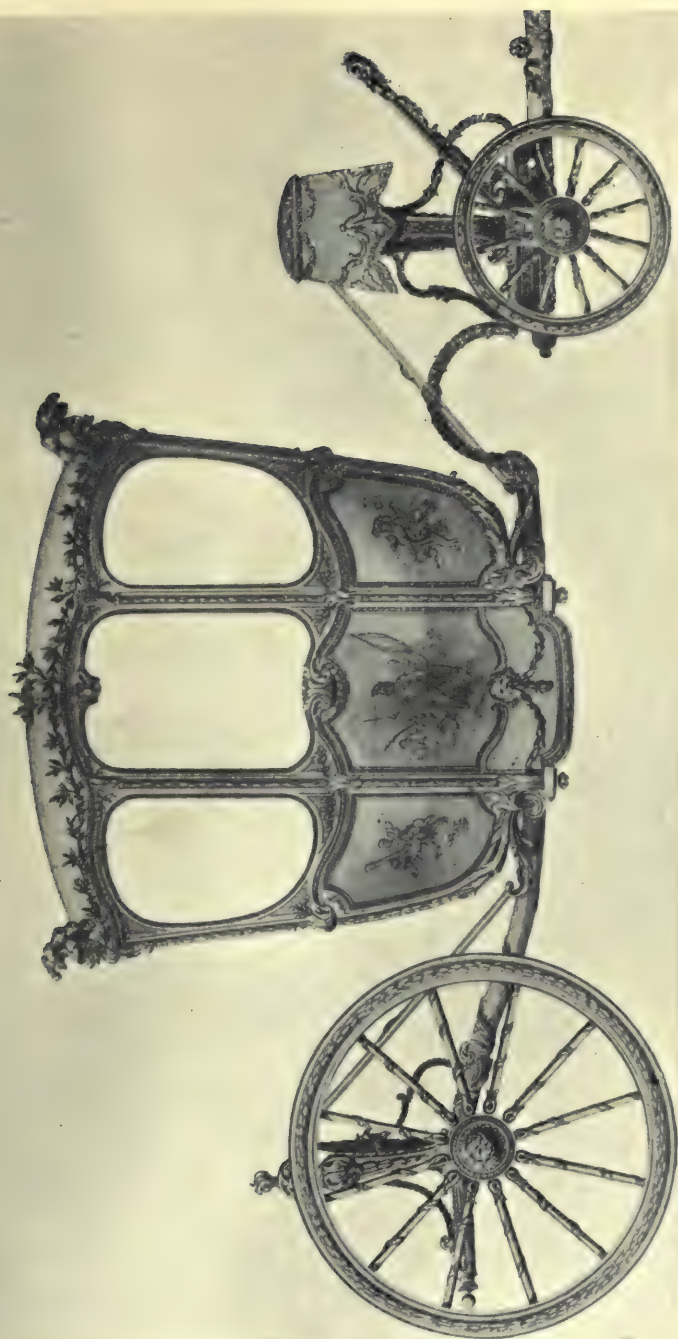
<sup>1</sup> Leroi, *Histoire de Versailles*, vol. ii. p. 273.

intended, not for the friend to whom the letter was addressed, but for the most Christian Louis himself.

The method of investigation, we are told, was very simple. The addresses, handwriting, and seals of the letters were examined. To an expert these revealed a good deal. Suspicious letters were selected and handed over to six or seven clerks whose business it was to open them. An impression of the seal was first carefully taken; the letters were then laid seal downwards over a goblet of hot water which melted the wax and "spoiled nothing." This safely accomplished, the letters were opened and read; extracts were made and the originals were carefully refolded, re-sealed, and sent on their way as if nothing had happened.

But something had happened. Every Sunday morning as regularly and as freely as if he were one of the Secretaries of State, the chief official of the Post Office crossed to the palace, and entered the king's cabinet. He carried with him the extracts of the week. "I would as soon," said M. Quesnay, one of the physicians of Louis XV., "I would as soon dine with the public executioner as with Monsieur the *Intendant des Postes*."<sup>1</sup> For, when Monsieur the Intendant came out again, there frequently followed him certain *huissiers* of the palace, and certain soldiers of the musketeers, bearing sealed letters, *lettres de*

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires de Madame du Hausset*, p. 64 *seq.*



CARRIAGE OF A NOBLE.

From 'L'Art du Menuisier; Arts et Métiers,' published by Académie des Sciences.





*cachet* signed by the king, ordering imprisonment or banishment. It might only be banishment from court or imprisonment in fairly comfortable quarters until further orders, but it was always disgrace, and often worse.

Just opposite the Post Office, but a much larger building, was the *Grand Commun*, with the kitchens, pantries and wine cellars for the palace.<sup>1</sup> On its first floor were sets of rooms where lived several of the court officials. M. Lieutaud, for example, the learned doctor of Louis XVI.,<sup>2</sup> and M. de la Ferté, the nobleman who administered the *Menus Plaisirs*, or lesser expenses of the king—who was responsible for all royal ceremonies and for much more beside—lived there. Above these, on the second floor, were the almoners, gentlemen-in-waiting, *huissiers* and valets of the king. On the ground floor were the offices in which were carried on the house-keeping for the palace, and which were divided into two departments, the *Bouche*, which served the tables of the royal family, and the *Commun*, which served those of the royal household.

Of these the more important was the *Bouche*, with its own pantry, cellar, and kitchen arrangements. First came the pantry, which looked after the bread,

<sup>1</sup> Nolhac, *Château de Versailles*, p. 23 (*Mémoires de la Société des Sciences morales de Seine et Oise*, 1889).

<sup>2</sup> Leroi, *Histoire de Versailles*, vol. ii. p. 163.

salt, and fruit, and supplied the porcelain, knives, forks and spoons as well as the boxes to hold the hired table-linen. "It has always been a rule," says a competent authority, "that no linen should belong to his Majesty, for if it did, little care would be taken not to destroy, burn, or steal it. All the linen therefore belongs to the contractor and the king only pays for the hire of each article."<sup>1</sup> Rather less than a shilling of our money was paid for each use of a table-cloth, and about threepence for its "washing, drying, and ironing," and the contractor was bound to keep all he supplied in good repair.<sup>2</sup> The same rule applied to many of the utensils of the *Bouche*.

After the pantry came the buttery or *gobelet*—that is, the cellar department. It had to see after the wine, coffee, ices, and the water of Avray, brought from a little village a short distance from Versailles, which alone was used on the royal table, and it supplied also the tumblers, wine-glasses, and water-bottles. Thirty men were attached to the service of the pantry, and thirty to that of the buttery.

But when we come to the third department—the kitchen of the king—we find ninety nobles and something like seventy servants busied there.

<sup>1</sup> *Maison du roi en 1789*, Tableau 4, note.

<sup>2</sup> *Archives Nationales*, O' 736.

True, the nobles and upper servants only served for three months at a time, so that there were not more than twenty to twenty-five on duty each day, and this indeed seems sufficient.

The kitchen had its sub-divisions. There were the soup-makers, pastry-cooks, and cooks proper ; cooks also to superintend the roasting, and see that each joint was turned to perfection. Superior to these were the officials whose duty it was to see that the various supplies for the different departments arrived in proper order and at the proper time. The meat to make soup for the next day, for example, arrived at three o'clock every afternoon, and a Controller of the Kitchen must be there to see it come. He who superintended the pantry had a harder task : game arrived at five in the morning in summer and at seven in winter. Bread arrived at seven or eight in the morning and at five in the afternoon. Four varieties of soup, six of game or poultry, nine entrées, and nine dishes of cheese or sweets made up the daily bill of fare ; and the dinner cost from 380 to 480 francs a day, or from fifteen to nineteen pounds sterling.

After the *Bouche* came the *Commun*. It had the same varied services, but had fewer officials ; it was less honourable to belong to it than to the *Bouche*, consequently fewer posts had to be created to satisfy aspirants to office. But if the



*Commun* had fewer servants than the *Bouche* it had more to do. It had the table for the great officers of the court at twelve o'clock, and that for the lesser dignitaries at two; a table for the king's clergy, another for his gentlemen servants, and yet another for his *valets de chambre*—about one hundred persons in all. There was also the table of the Grand Master, at which nobles about to be presented were entertained on the morning of presentation, and every Tuesday a dinner for the ambassadors, which cost much the same sum as that for the king.

Two more departments—the *Fruiterie* and the *Fourrière*—complete the list. The first supplied the candles, white and yellow, which lighted the tables of the palace, the torches and lamps, which illuminated the apartments, and the last saw to the keeping up of the fires both in the *Grand Commun* and the palace. On Mondays and Thursdays the head officials of each department met to look over and settle accounts, and on Saturdays to arrange the *menu* for the following week.<sup>1</sup> Such was the royal housekeeping.

To the south of the palace, on the other side of the Place d'Armes, were the royal stables. There were two, the *Grande Écurie* on the left and the *Petite Écurie* on the right of the Avenue de Paris.

<sup>1</sup> *Maison du roi en 1789*, Tableau No. 2, and *État de la France*, 1749, vol. i. p. 168 *seq.*



Although called large and small the stables were of equal size and their officers of equal rank. Groups of statuary stood on their *façades*, and paintings, gilding, and tapestry adorned their walls. Some of the grandest balls given by the king or his nobles were held there.

Each stable had its own officers, service, and functions. In the *Grande* were kept war-horses, riding-horses, and horses used in the training-school. In the *Petite* were the *coureurs* or swift horses used at the chase, and the carriage horses of the king, making some fifteen hundred in all. In the *Petite Écurie* were also the king's carriages, two hundred and fifty of them, of all kinds and costliness. One we are told was worth thirty thousand francs.

The horses, carriages, saddle-rooms and linen-stores, the great hall of the riding-school and the infirmary stable were on the ground floor and opened into large courts where the horses were exercised. Into the court of the *Petite Écurie* wild boars were occasionally let loose in order to accustom the *coureurs* to their work, and now and again the boars escaped into the streets of Versailles, where, attacked by stray dogs, they caused much havoc and confusion. On the first floors lodged the officers of the stables. They were nobles of the highest rank, and lived in corresponding luxury.

The stables were however most important as a

training school for the young men sent to court as pages. Fifty were attached to the *Grande* and about thirty to the *Petite Écurie*. They were sons of nobles and were sent early to court, and received board, education, and clothing from the king. They had their chapels, dining-halls, library, class-rooms, and dormitories in the *Grande*, fifty little rooms all painted yellow and furnished alike;<sup>1</sup> how they were painted in the *Petite Écurie* history does not say. A governor and under-governors superintended their education. They had writing, drawing, and mathematical masters; but their most serious instruction was in riding, dancing, shooting, and the practice of arms; they also learned to keep their temper and, strange as it may seem, to be indifferent to luxury.<sup>2</sup>

There was another set of pages who shared in the duties of those of the stables but who were attached to the household of the king. Before being received as a page these must each prove two hundred years of direct noble descent and be provided with six hundred francs a year as pocket money. They lived in the Rue de l'Orangerie, and were educated, clothed, and fed with "a truly regal magnificence, their best coats alone costing as much as sixty English pounds."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> D'Hezecques, *Souvenirs d'un page de Louis XVI.*, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> See *Idem*, p. 111 *seq.* and *État de la France*, 1749, vol. ii. p. 199 *seq.*

<sup>3</sup> D'Hezecques, *Souvenirs d'un page de Louis XVI.*, p. 113.

In return for all this the pages had certain duties to perform. If the king hunted, four of the pages of the *Petite Écurie* were at hand, carrying his hunting dogs on their saddles, comfortably arranged on cushions. When he returned from the chase four pages received him at the carriage door with lighted torches and walked before him to his chamber; and when he retired to bed two pages of the household were there to hand him his slippers.

The population of the stables equalled that of many a village. In the *écuries* were lodged the heralds, trumpeters, and others who appeared only on State occasions—the twelve couriers attached to the service of the king and the Secretaries of State, the gentlemen *valets de pied* who ran by the king's carriage, and had in turn valets of their own. Surgeons, apothecaries, grooms, coachmen, saddlers, spur-makers, drapers, gold-lace embroiderers, helped to swell the numbers, which amounted in all to something over fifteen hundred men.

Nor were these the only royal stables at Versailles. The brothers of Louis XVI. had each his own; Marie Antoinette and her sisters-in-law had theirs, and scattered about in different parts were the stables of the king's guard.<sup>1</sup>

In the Place des Tribunaux there stands to-day the Palais de Justice or law-court of Versailles.

<sup>1</sup> Leroi, *Histoire de Versailles*, vol. ii. pp. 242, 268, and vol. i. p. 317.



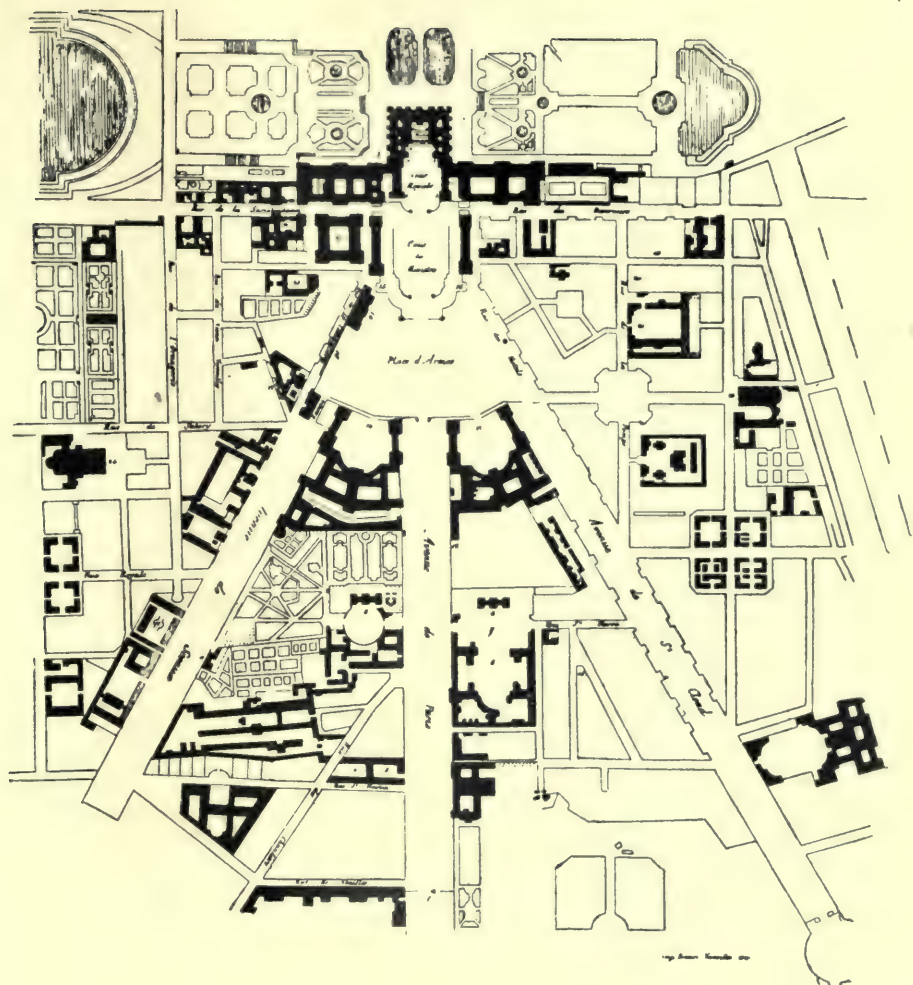
In old days this was the *Vénerie* where the horses and hounds used in stag-hunting were kept. Under Louis XIV. there were one hundred and fifty horses, from two to three hundred hounds, one hundred valets for the hounds, a company of mounted guards, as well as huntsmen, the *Grand Veneur* controlling all with some fifty gentlemen subordinates.

In the Avenue de St. Cloud were the kennels for young dogs. These kennels had six courts exposed to the south where the dogs might lie on cold days; they were planted with trees so that the summer heat might not beat too fiercely, and each was supplied with water. A keeper, three valets, and a baker sufficed for this establishment. There was also the *Vautrait* which provided for the wild-boar hunt, and the *Fauconnerie*, although this last had become an obsolete sport, and its officers appeared only on occasions of ceremony.

But while so much thought and care were bestowed on luxury and etiquette, neither charity nor education was forgotten in this royal town, and the Bourbon kings—always good sons of the church—gave gifts of land and other contributions to the support of the clergy. True, the parish of Notre-Dame cost the crown a little less, and the parish of St. Louis only a little more than the lighting of the courts and corridors of the palace, but the king contributed also to the priests of the *Doctrine Chrétienne* who



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VERSAILLES.  
CHATEAU. PLACE D'ARMES AND AVENUES.

*From 'Histoire de Versailles,' by Le Roi.*



taught the boys' primary school, and to the nuns of the order of St. Vincent de Paul who taught the girls.

These nuns also superintended a bureau of charity. Such bureaux were found all over France, and at them the very poor could secure shelter and food in return for work done. They were, however, sadly inadequate to the needs of the people, and were generally badly administered; but it should not be forgotten that they existed, or that they were supported by so selfish a king as Louis XV. There was still another charity in this town of Versailles—the king paid surgeons for the poor, one in the parish of Notre-Dame and another in that of St. Louis.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Leroi, *État de Versailles avant 1789*, pp. 91, 92.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES.



CARDINAL RICHELIEU.

THE Palace of Versailles to-day is a maze of picture galleries and a series of deserted rooms. The outside of the palace is not impressive. The building is very large, and has many windows, but it has no beauty, such as that of the Louvre. It was not the palace nor the palace

courts and palace gardens, but the palace service and etiquette which made Versailles so famous.

The courts and gardens are still there—the great Place d'Armes, the Cour des Ministres, into which all might come and go; the smaller Cour Royale, where only carriages of the king and princes of the blood might enter; and the inner Cour de Marbre, round which were built the king's and queen's apart-



ments. But the display to which these served as a background is gone.

The Gardes Françaises, in red and blue, no longer keep the outer gates. The Gardes de la Porte no longer stand by the rail of the Cour Royale, admitting none until the hour of the *lever*, or king's toilet, and then only the privileged who had the honours of the Louvre.<sup>1</sup> The gardens are still magnificent. The winding walks, thick hedges, formal parterres; the long, wide canal, the lakes with dolphin fountains, the marble and bronze statues, remain; but the ladies in brocade with skirts eight yards wide, the gentlemen in gold and velvet who lingered on the great steps of the Orangerie, are gone.

The gardens stretch for a mile or more to the north of the palace. To the west, on a lower plateau, is the Orangerie, which was often roofed in like a huge conservatory to serve as a banqueting hall. From the flight of steps which leads down to it, one looks over to a large sheet of water, the *Pièce des Suisses*, where Marie Antoinette and her courtiers spent some of their gayest hours. On clear winter mornings the Court skated there, and the queen and her ladies joined the throng and made all men envious

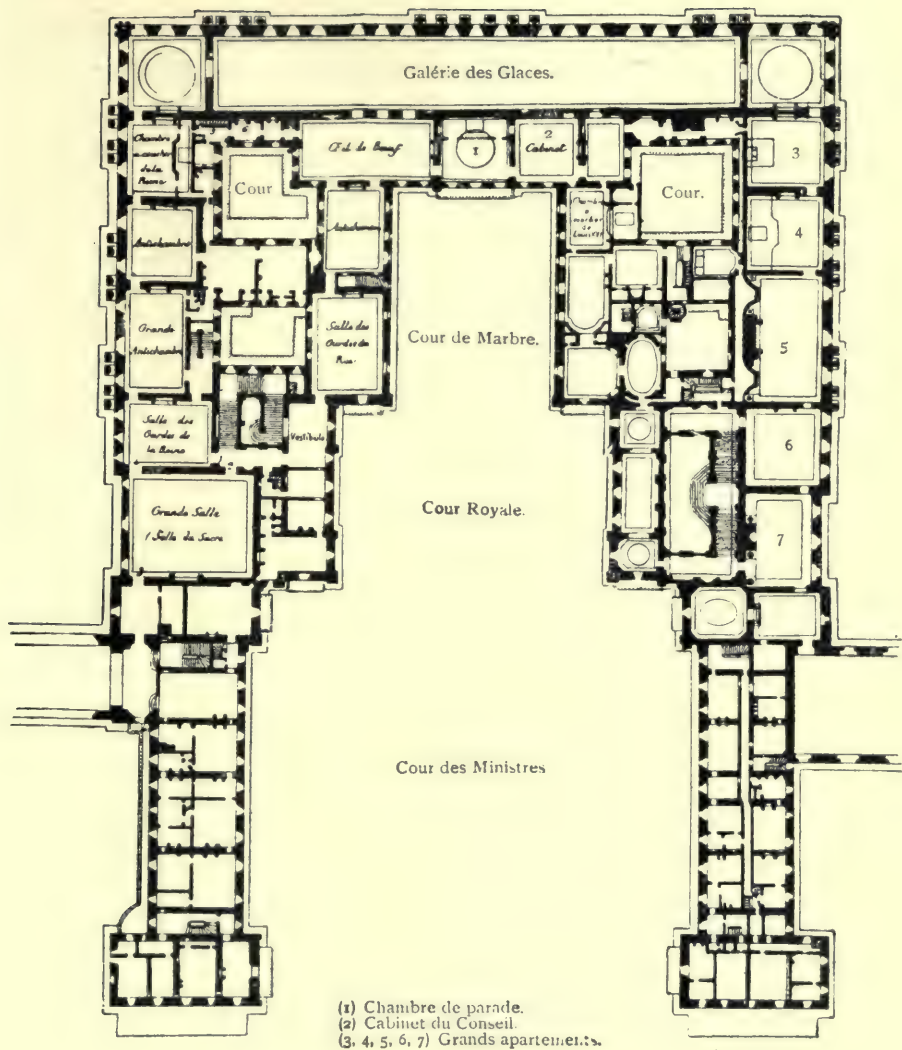
<sup>1</sup> *Honours of the Louvre* implied right of access to the king. They belonged originally to the principal ladies and gentlemen in attendance on the king, queen, or royal family. Ladies who had *honours* were allowed to sit in presence of the queen. See Madame de Genlis, *Dictionnaire des Etiquettes. Présentation.*

of the one young noble who for the moment was permitted to speed Majesty over the ice in gilded chair.

Between the Rue Satori and the Pièce des Suisses was the king's kitchen-garden. A charming place it must have been, with its little separate gardens all along one side, divided by walls covered with plum, pear, peach, and apricot trees; its great asparagus, melon, and cucumber beds; its strawberry garden, its fig-trees and cherry-trees, and the coffee-plants which Louis XV. loved, and from which coffee was grown for the king's own use.<sup>1</sup> It is a school of horticulture now.

Of the palace itself a study of its plan will alone convey a correct idea. There were many changes from time to time in the allotment and even arrangement of its apartments, but there were certain landmarks which never altered. The centre of the palace, architecturally and figuratively, was the comparatively small part built round the Cour de Marbre, and the centre of life there was the Œil-de-Bœuf. This is a large room, and opens into the Galerie des Glaces, into the king's suite of apartments, into the guard-room of the king's guards, and, on its fourth side, has a little door which leads into the apartments of the queen. It had a window set high in its wall which was shaped like the eye of an ox, and gave it its name. Huge wood fires blazed in its open fire-

<sup>1</sup> See Leroi, *Notice Historique sur les Potagers du Roi à Versailles*.



# CHATEAU DE VERSAILLES.

## CENTRAL PART.

*From 'Histoire de Versailles,' by Le Roi.*





place ; good-natured Swiss guards hung about, and the nobles, in their court suits, with their swords, and sparkling jewels, talked, gossiped, crushed and jostled, until the moment of their admittance to the royal presence. Meantime the people waited in the gallery, and if one, more adventurous or more ignorant than another, ventured amongst the aristocratic crowd, the Swiss would slip quietly near and give a hint that saved him from a rude rebuff.

For strange as it may seem, the people were a part of the life of Versailles. They were expected there, and were freely admitted to almost every part of the palace.

Travellers such as Arthur Young remarked on it, and thought it detrimental to the dignity of a Court ; but they forgot that the king, sacred as he was, was looked upon as the father of his people, and that this worship of him by the people was a homage which belonged to the very idea of his kingship. "The king," writes De Tocqueville, "inspired in the French people a sentiment which the most despotic prince the world has ever seen has failed to command. They have for him the affection one feels towards a father and the reverence one owes only to God."

Opening immediately out of the *Œil-de-Bœuf* is the room known as the bedroom of Louis XIV., but after his death used as a *chambre de parade*—

that is, the room in which the king's ceremonial toilet was performed. Its window opened on a balcony, over which hung the clock whose hands still marked the hour at which the last king of France had died. Its great state bed was railed off by a golden rail, for the king's bed, like himself, was sacred, and must be saluted by all who passed. Next to this room was the *cabinet du conseil*, where state business was transacted, then came the king's sleeping-room, furnished with blue hangings and the bed trimmed with ostrich feathers. After it was the *cabinet de la pendule*, or grand cabinet, where the king received official visits, and in idle mood watched the people in the court below. Off these were other rooms—the ante-chamber of the king's guards and his private dining room—from which opened a set of little rooms, where Louis XVI. worked at his favourite pursuits.<sup>1</sup>

The corresponding wing across the court was devoted to the queen. Her state rooms—her bedroom, ante-chamber (where the king dined with her and his family), her ladies' waiting room, and her guard-room—overlooked the Orangerie; while the little rooms, the *petits appartements* where she retired when anxious to relax etiquette, looked on an inner court.

It would take long to enumerate the rooms of

<sup>1</sup> D'Hezecques, *Souvenirs d'un page de Louis XVI.*, 150 seq.; also Nollac, *Chateau de Versailles*, p. 62 seq.

all who lived in Versailles. There were sets for nobles who, while in office, lived in the palace, and a long wing with apartments, "dark and uncomfortable,"<sup>1</sup> but much coveted by the nobles who had duties in the palace but were only obliged to be there at certain hours—he, for example, who had nightly to pull off the right sleeve of the king's coat; perhaps he also of the left!

We are apt to laugh at the numerous offices at the Court of Versailles, and at its complicated system of etiquette, but the offices which appear absurd to us not only had their origin in reasons of state but were in themselves an influence in political matters.

In older days the French nobles had been very troublesome to their king and quarrelsome with each other. They had lived as sovereigns on their lands, and in each baron's castle there had been a hall of justice where the lords tried their vassals, holding over them the power of life and death.

The great Cardinal Richelieu who had ruled France under Louis the XIII. wished to break this power. He wished to have all government come directly from the king, and to see the king's authority directly represented in every district of France. He therefore divided France into *généralités*, over each of which he appointed an Intendant, who

<sup>1</sup> D'Hezecques, *Souvenirs d'un page de Louis XVI.*, p. 146.



was to do in the king's name the work the lords used to do in their own. These were never chosen from the nobles but always from the middle classes ; and in order to keep them quite free from local influences they were not appointed to the province in which they had been brought up, but to some district to which they were strangers.<sup>1</sup>

This much the great Cardinal had done, but his work of centralising all power in the king was hardly complete so long as the great nobles lived on their old estates. Unless something was proposed to compensate their loss of power they would remain a dangerous element. Louis the XIV. therefore created all kinds of posts about his own person which he made very honourable and paid well, and these he offered to the great nobles.

It was a clever plan and served two ends most successfully. It drew the nobles from their estates and it glorified the king. Offices in the king's chamber and in the king's wardrobe, that is, in the departments of his household which waited on his person were eagerly sought after ; indeed anything at court was thought better than the shadow of the old power at home, and it became the fashion to live at Versailles and leave the old territories and vassals to the Intendants, who soon had it all their own way.

<sup>1</sup> Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 73.



But clever as the plan was it gave the nobles a new power. They now formed parties in the court and plotted to influence the king and his ministers, and for this the elaborate system of etiquette gave them opportunity. The courtiers were with the king when he dressed and undressed, watching his movements, his words, his looks; they followed him to mass and they waited on him at meals.

At half-past eleven the king's formal toilet or *lever* was performed, and with it began his official day. At that hour the door of his *chambre de parade* was opened, an officer called out "Gentlemen of the Wardrobe," and there passed in the officers of the wardrobe to whom was entrusted the left side of His Majesty, and the gentlemen of his chamber who attended to the right. With these officers entered also the princes of the blood and all who had the privilege of what was called the *Grande Entrée*.

Meantime waiting their turn in the *Œil-de-Bœuf* were the less important personages, who were admitted when the next, or *Première Entrée*, was called; finally, the king's toilet being complete, the doors were flung wide open, and every well-dressed gentleman who cared to enter was admitted to witness His Majesty's morning prayers.

At the *lever* a good deal of actual business was transacted. The clergy had the first turn. Immediately that the toilet was complete, before the

prayers were said, the clergy who had requests to make addressed the king. After prayers came the Secretaries of State and other officers who wished papers signed and orders given or confirmed ; indeed the work done between the king's *lever* and his attendance at mass very materially lessened the business of his Councils.<sup>1</sup>

From the *chambre de parade* the king passed to the royal chapel. Attended by the gentlemen of his bed-chamber, his clergy and any of the princes who chose to accompany him, the king went into the Galerie des Glaces, where he was joined by the procession of the Queen, or by that Dauphiness or Princess, who represented Majesty, and whose toilet had also its *entrées* and its strict, even embarrassing etiquette. Together they passed through the *Grands appartements*, always open to the public, and the great Salon d'Hercule to the chapel. There sitting in the gallery, or tribune, as it is called, the royal family heard mass.

From mass they went to dinner, the preparation for which was so curious as to deserve description. Before the king's toilet was ended, the time and place of his dinner was daily given to an officer of the bed-chamber, and communicated by him

<sup>1</sup> For ceremonial of the *lever* see D'Hezecques, *Souvenirs d'un page de Louis XVI.*, p. 161 seq., and *État général de la France*, 1789, vol. i., p. 97.

to an officer in charge of the dining-hall, who in turn marched to the guard-room of the household, knocked at its door with his wand and called out, "Gentlemen, to the covers of the king."

Two or three of the guards, carabine on shoulder, came out, and with the *huissier*, proceeded through the palace corridors, across a little connecting bridge to the *Gobelet* in the *Grand Commun*. There the procession was joined by the *Chef du Gobelet*, who, preceded by the *huissier* and two table-cloths, and guarded on either side, carried that precious and almost sacred vessel, the king's *nef*. Except in strict privacy the king could not dine without the *nef*, and no courtier, not even a princess of the blood, might pass it without saluting. It was made of gold, and shaped like the ship in the arms of the city of Paris, and it held the supply of table-napkins to be used by the king during the repast.<sup>1</sup>

Arrived in the queen's ante-chamber, where the king dined at *grand couvert*, that is, with the queen and royal family, immense ceremony was used in laying the side-board and table. Nothing was left either to chance or convenience; even the end of the table-cloth which was to be held by particular officials as it was spread on the table was carefully laid down by court law. When the side-board and then the king's table was prepared,

<sup>1</sup> *État de la France*, 1749, vol. i., p. 144.

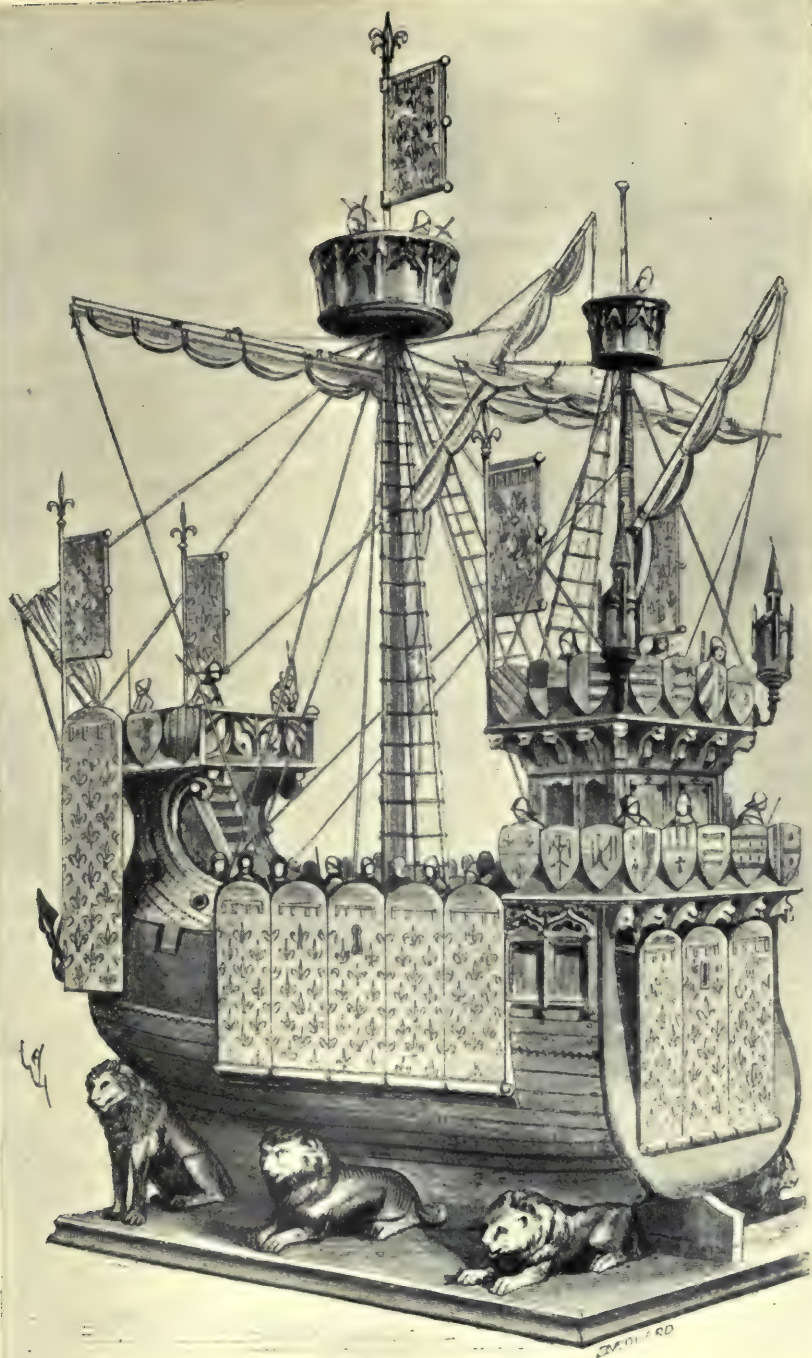


the gentleman-servant for the day took two pieces of bread, touched everything on side-board or table—knives, forks, spoons, toothpicks, bread, salt, even the table-napkins in the *nef*—and gave one bit to the *Chef du Gobelet* to eat, and himself ate the other. This was intended as a safeguard against poison, and when the ceremony was completed a gentleman servant was appointed to keep guard over the side-board and another over the table.

Meantime the *huissier* had again gone to the guard-room, had again knocked at its door, and this time had cried, "Gentlemen, to the king's food." These then went to the office of the kitchen and there found three principal officials of the *Bouche*. Their coming was the signal for the dishes to be sent in, and there the same ceremony of touching each article of food and eating the bread which had touched it was invariably gone through. Thus tested, the dinner was carried to the table. First marched three guards, next a *huissier*, wand in hand, then Monsieur the Squire of the Kitchen, followed by the keeper of the king's dinner service; next came the first dish carried by a gentleman attached to the pantry, and the second by a controller of the kitchen, the others following in due order. Guards marched alongside and saw that no one touched the viands of the king.

And now the king himself was summoned. Once





NEF OF THE XV<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY.

*From Viollet-le-duc's 'Dictionnaire du Mobilier-français.'*



more the *huissier* left the dining-room, this time followed by the *Maitre d'hôtel*, who carried a damp and scented table-napkin between two gold plates. This he presented to the king, and dinner was ready. It was of course served with much state. At each course a fresh table-napkin was taken from the *nef* and given to His Majesty, and when he drank the ceremony was great. The gentleman-servant acting as butler for the day called out "to the king's drink," bowed, and went to the sideboard. There the *Chef du Gobelet* gave him a golden saucer with a covered crystal cup. Preceded by one official and followed by another he carried these to the table, and all three gentlemen bowed gravely to the king. The two attendants each held a tiny golden cup into which the gentleman-servant poured wine and water. They drank, and the king's cup having been thus tested was handed to him, after which he might assuage his thirst. When the king had done so, all again bowed and returned to the sideboard.<sup>1</sup>

But however ceremonious, the royal dinner was not a quiet meal. "From mass," wrote Marie-Antoinette to her mother in the summer after her marriage, "we go to dinner. We two"—the Dauphin and herself—"dine together before everyone, but dinner is over at half-past one, for we eat very

<sup>1</sup> *État de la France*, 1749, vol. i., p. 143 seq.

quickly.”<sup>1</sup> At the dinner hour, writes Madame Campan, the stairs and galleries of Versailles were crowded with “honest folk who, after seeing the Dauphiness eat her soup, went to see the princes eat their *bouilli*, and then ran themselves out of breath”—the passages were long—“to behold *Mesdames* at dessert.”<sup>2</sup> Little wonder that the young Dauphin and Dauphiness ate their dinner “very quickly.”

At seven o'clock the gaming-tables were set out in the apartments of the queen, or, if there were not a queen, in those of her representative; and until nine o'clock she, as first lady of the kingdom, was expected to be present. It was the hour of reception, when, as at the morning toilet, she was bound to remember the exact rank of each courtier who greeted her and to greet him accordingly, and when with each card that was passed to her she had to receive the kiss on her hand which etiquette required.<sup>3</sup>

At nine o'clock the royal family had supper, and when night came and the monarch retired his courtiers were still with him; he knelt at the balustrade which surrounded the state bed, a priest by his side who recited the prayers and held in each hand a candle. The king prayed and the courtiers waited.

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. i. p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> Madame de Genlis, *Dictionnaire des Etiquettes*, vol. i., p. 188.



wondering anxiously to whom the candles would be passed, for to receive a candle which had burned as the most Christian king had prayed, was a mark of the highest royal favour.<sup>1</sup>

There was still another ceremony which formed part of the court routine, though it was more characteristic of the country palaces of Compiègne and Fontainebleau than of Versailles. This marked the return of the king from the hunt, and was called the unbooting or *débotter*, and at it the members of the royal family, the nobles who had the right of *Grande Entrée*, whether to the king or queen, and the pages of the king's household were expected to be present. They had to appear in court dress, and Madame Campan, when reader to the king's daughters, thus describes the scene: "The princesses," she says, "discarded court dress in their own rooms, and when the summons came they slipped a great hoop over their skirts and a gold-embroidered petticoat, tied a long train round their waist and hid deficiencies by a large black cloak. Thus attired, led by their *chevaliers d'honneur*, attended by ladies-in-waiting, pages, and equerries, and preceded by ushers bearing torches to light them along the galleries where courtiers hurried from all parts of the palace, the princesses attended the unbooting of the king."

A valet of the king's chamber pulled off the

<sup>1</sup> D'Hezecques, *Souvenirs d'un page de Louis XVI.*, p. 166.

right boot, a valet of his wardrobe the left.<sup>1</sup> The king kissed each daughter on her forehead and the ceremony was over. The princesses returned to their rooms, were divested of their state garments, and "in quarter of an hour from the time they were disturbed had resumed their tapestry while I had resumed my book."<sup>2</sup>

The return of the hounds was also an event. In the kitchen of the kennels large cauldrons stood by the fire, carefully watched lest their contents should be too hot to give to the hounds on the moment of return. The hearts, livers, and feet of five oxen were boiled into a strong soup and into this forty loaves were broken, while in addition to the prepared meal the dogs were treated to one of the slain stags.<sup>3</sup>

Louis XV. who liked to see his hounds enjoy their feast, was often present, and occasionally ordered the feast, or *curée*, as it was called, to take place on the terrace at Compiègne or in a court-yard at Fontainebleau or Versailles where he and his family could conveniently look on.

On these occasions the huntsmen collected the hounds and awaited the arrival of the king who came in his hunting-dress. The master huntsman, the Duc de Conti or the Duc de Penthièvre, as the case

<sup>1</sup> Warroquier, *État de la France*.

<sup>2</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> This was sufficient for 150 hounds. D'Yauville, *Traité de Vénérerie*, p. 238.

# L' Halali .

On Sonne cette Fanfare lorsque  
le Cerf est aux Obois, Soit sur  
Terre, Soit dans l'Eau .







might be, handed the king a long pole and himself held another. This was the signal for the meal, and the soup was greedily devoured; then, for their digestion's good, the hounds were held back a while by the valet's whip from the carcass of the stag. At length the king gave a signal to the master-huntsman, who in turn made a sign with his wand, and the eager beasts were allowed their will. The feast ended, a *fanfare* or flourish of trumpets was sounded and the dogs were led off to their kennels.<sup>1</sup>

These things, the ceremonial, the gaming-tables, the chase, filled the outward life of Versailles; but there too was carried on the government of France, and there also the cabals and intrigues which had often so disastrous an effect on that government.

<sup>1</sup> D'Yauville, *Traité de la Vénérerie*, p. 150 *seq.*; in this volume, which is to be found in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, bound in red morocco with the king's monogram on its side and exquisitely printed, are forty of these *fanfares* set to music.

## CHAPTER III.

### "IN THE KING'S NAME."



LOUIS XV.

**I**N the days of the old regime France was governed directly from Versailles. But there still lingered certain popular institutions which had once been powerful. The village assemblies which used to meet in the nave of the parish church, in the village

square, or it might be in the village churchyard, and there arrange for the defence of crops and vines from robbery, for the care of forests and roads, for the repair of church and belfry, presbytery and school-house, could still be summoned by the village bell, but they had long ceased to have executive power. Their resolutions were passed over to the care of the Intendant, who in his

turn was obliged to submit all business to the decision of Versailles, and the village assemblies thus overshadowed by the Intendant's power, had fallen largely into disuse. There were also in certain districts of France—in Brittany, Languedoc and Provence, for example, *États*, or bodies which had ruled these provinces before their annexation to France. But these also had lost much of their old power, and at best were confined to a small part of the kingdom. In a very literal sense France was governed from Versailles.

Each separate department, the War Office, the Marine, the Finance, Foreign Affairs and the King's Household, which included much of the internal business of the kingdom, had a minister who was absolute master in his own department subject only to the king. To the king each minister submitted his proposals before laying them on the Council table, and he did so knowing that his continuance in office depended on whether or no these proposals pleased his sovereign.<sup>1</sup> A self-interested minister planned his proposals to suit the idiosyncrasies of the king, and an indolent or bigoted king chose his ministers to suit himself. The welfare of the country was therefore perilously dependant on the character of the king, for no

<sup>1</sup> See on this subject Joseph II. of Austria in the *Correspondance secrète du Comte de Mercy*, vol. iii. p. 62.

minister however great could withstand his will. It was this, rather than despotic acts, that made the monarchy a despotism in the old regime.

The business of government was transacted by the Council of State,<sup>1</sup> which had five separate departments; the *Conseil en haut* or department of foreign affairs; the *Conseil de la Finance*, which had to do with all matters of revenue; the *Conseil des Dépêches*, which regulated the internal administration of the kingdom; the *Conseil de la Guerre* and, lastly, the *Conseil des Parties*, which settled disputes that had arisen in law-courts. The king, his ministers and secretaries of state, certain great officers of the crown, and a number of councillors holding office at the pleasure of the king, made up the Council of State. But at its deliberations the Dauphin, Monsieur—that is, the brother of the king next in age to himself—and sometimes the queen, were present.

The Council of State met both in its separate councils and in what was called *Grand Conseil*, when all the different departments consulted together, and the king presided over all. On such occasions the king sat at the head of the great square table covered with violet velvet, with the heir-apparent or another great noble, the Chancellor and the ministers on his right and left. Along the sides

<sup>1</sup> For a full account of the Councils see *État de la France*, 1749, vol. iv.; Boiteau, *L'État de la France en 1789*, pp. 116-119; *Almanack Royal*, 1771.





*From the 'Livre du Sacre et du Couronnement de Louis XVI.'*



were the councillors in their black silk robes and black velvet caps, men of experience and of mature years, chosen from the church, the army, and the law; while at the end of the room, standing in a semicircle, were the young Masters of Requests.

In older days these Masters of Requests had helped the king in his personal administration of justice, in the later days of the old regime they had certain special duties to perform. Four of their number still sat in the Parlement of Paris, and acted there as representatives of the king, while as belonging to the Council of State they were charged with looking over and preparing the business to be done.

This was indeed both multifarious and important.<sup>1</sup> The Council of State regulated the militia, decided upon all public works, maintained order in the provinces, assigned funds for the relief of the poor, and encouraged agriculture. The whole internal government of France was under its control; it reversed judgments made in the highest law-courts and it issued orders for the mending of a church belfry, and all this it did in the name and by the express sanction of the king. The councillors gave advice which the king accepted or not as he pleased, and his decision was final, for *L'État*

<sup>1</sup> For an idea of the details brought before it, see the British Museum Catalogues on France, *Conseil d'État*.

*c'est moi*, "I am the State," was the maxim of the last sovereigns of France.

The resolutions come to in Council were called *arrêts du conseil*, and were of two kinds: those which gave orders or decisions and those which created new laws. All new measures determined on by the king in council were called *édits* or edicts, and absolute as was the sovereign these edicts did not become law until registered in the books of the Parlement of Paris. To it, therefore, we must now turn.

Round the Palais de Justice, where sat this Parlement of Paris, there clustered some of the city's oldest and proudest memories.

The building in which its courts were held is the same in which the law-courts are held at this day. On one side of it is a prison; on the other a chapel. The prison is the famous Conciergerie, once a palace, in whose dim halls St. Louis lived and reigned, the chapel is the Sainte Chapelle which he built; both communicate with and are a part of the Palais de Justice.

In the days of St. Louis justice was dispensed by the king in person in his *cour du roi*, and the palace and the law-court were one and the same. The king then held much the same relation to his subjects that a *seigneur* or baron did to his vassals, and the court of justice was in both cases a hall in the castle. But



before St. Louis died, law-cases had come to be written, and he and his soldier counsellors, not accustomed to clerk-work, called in the help of learned men, their inferiors in rank, whom they made to sit on benches at their feet, but who by degrees became the *legistes*—the law administrators or Parlement of Paris,<sup>1</sup> whose judges held their post by hereditary right.

But this was not a Parliament in the English sense of the term, it was not representative and it had no power of making laws. Indeed, the only representative body which France possessed was the States-General, made up of deputies from the three estates: the clergy, the aristocracy and the commons, or as they were called in France, the Third Estate. This body was only summoned on occasions of special need, and had not met since the year 1614, and for all practical purposes it was non-existent. The Parlement of Paris was, therefore, simply a great Court of Justice whose magistrates were entrusted with keeping a register of the laws of France. In olden days this court registered as a matter of course the edicts sent it by the king, but gradually it had claimed and had been permitted the right of remonstrating with and

<sup>1</sup> Duruy, *Histoire de France*, vol. i. p. 370. For an account of the constitution of the Parlement of Paris see Monin, *L'État de Paris en 1789*, 29 *seq.*

petitioning the king against enactments it disliked. These remonstrances he could and frequently did disregard, but the fact that they could be made was some safeguard against despotism, and endeared the Parlement to the people.

As the kingdom grew and new provinces were added to France, new parlements sprang up, thirteen in all; but although holding no control over the provincial parlements, that of Paris, which could trace its history back to the *cour du roi*, had certain privileges which gave it rank as the first of the thirteen parlements of the kingdom.

In it every edict must be registered, while to the provincial parlements only those were sent which related to the province in which that Parlement administered justice.

In the Parlement of Paris alone the king appeared in person; in it the princes of the blood, the cousins of royalty—Bourbons, but not in the direct line—were entitled to sit, as soon as they had reached their fifteenth year, while the peers of the realm entered when twenty-five years of age, and the Archbishop and Governor of Paris were present by right of office.

The Parlement was divided into five separate courts: the *Grand' Chambre*, three *Chambres des Enquêtes*, and the *Chambre des Requêtes*, but when an edict was sent to be registered, all these courts met

in what was called *Chambres assemblées*, and while the courts were thus assembled all other business had to wait.

In this fact lay the strength of the Parlement. It could prolong its deliberations on the royal edicts until serious inconvenience was occasioned both to the public and to Versailles by the interruption of ordinary business, and in this way could occasionally put such pressure on the crown as to induce it to yield. But it could not do more. If matters came to an extremity, if the king insisted and the Parlement rebelled, the sovereign had recourse to a *Lit de Justice*,<sup>1</sup> that is, he either went himself to the Palais de Justice or summoned his Parlement to Versailles, and in his own person commanded the registration of the edict. Against this there was no appeal, and if the magistrates still protested they were invariably punished by exile from the capital for a longer or shorter period.

When the king visited his Parlement on any occasion other than that of a *Lit de Justice* the assembly was called a *Séance Royale*, and the ceremonial employed was almost the same on both occasions.

The king, exalted above everyone present, sat on cushions richly embroidered in *fleur-de-lys*, a canopy

<sup>1</sup> *Lit de Justice* derived its name from the king's seat, which was made up of a number of cushions over which was placed a canopy, so that the whole resembled a bed.



over his head. At his feet knelt his two mace-bearers, holding their silver-gilt mace, and near them stood six heralds. On the right sat the princes of the blood, and the lay peers of the realm ; the ecclesiastical peers were on the left, while below the prelates sat captains of the body-guard. Immediately below the throne, in an arm-chair covered with violet velvet and fleur-de-lys, sat the Chancellor, and on low stools before him were the Grand Master and the Master of Ceremonies.

All these were on a raised platform. The judges and the lawyers, as in the days of St. Louis, had benches on the floor, and between royalty and the lawyers, on a little step by which Versailles from its platform might descend to Paris on its floor, sat the Governor of Paris, with his white baton, the sign of office, in his hand. The judges and councillors in scarlet robes, the nobles in velvet or cloth of gold, the bishops in their violet satin trimmed with ermine, and the crown officers in gorgeous uniform, made the *Lit de Justice* a brilliant scene.

When all were assembled the king rose. Taking off and, as etiquette required, replacing his hat, he said that the Chancellor would announce the object of the *Lit de Justice*, and the Chancellor, mounting the step of the throne, knelt to receive his orders, then returned to his place, sat down, put on his hat, and made his speech. When it was ended the First



President of the Parlement<sup>1</sup> was allowed to reply, after which the Chancellor knelt again on the step of the throne and the king ordered the edict in question to be read, and this done the Advocate-general, the king's representative in Parlement, was told to show why, even against the will of Parlement, the edict must become law. Then followed the formality of asking the opinion one by one of peers, prelates, and magistrates on the registration of the edict, an opinion which the king was by no means bound to follow. "The king presides at Parlement as he does at the Council, without being obliged to abide by the majority," wrote Marie-Antoinette in 1787,<sup>2</sup> and when the formality of asking an opinion had been complied with, the Chancellor, standing in his place, read the order which compelled the Parlement to inscribe the edict on their books.<sup>3</sup>

The crown had the last as well as the first word in the making of the laws.

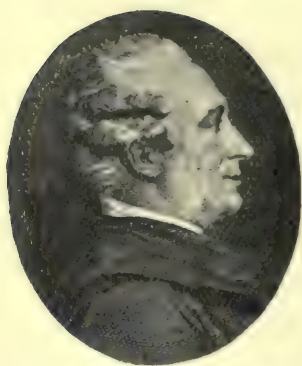
<sup>1</sup> There were eighteen presidents in the Parlement of Paris: six in the *Chambres des Enquêtes*, two in the *Chambre des Requêtes*, and ten in the *Grand'Chambre*. Of these ten, nine were called *présidents à mortier*, because their head-dress resembled a mortar-board, while the tenth or *premier président*, as head of the *Grand'Chambre*, presided over the whole. Monin, *L'État de Paris en 1789*, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Marie-Antoinette, *Joseph II., und Leopold von Toscana I.* Letter of 24th November, 1787.

<sup>3</sup> In the first volume of *Archives Parlementaires* is found a detailed account of the *Lit de Justice* of 8th May, 1788, which gives the ceremonial in full. See also Cheruel, *Dictionnaire des Usages et des Mœurs*.

## CHAPTER IV.

### PRIVILEGE.



CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

IN the days of Louis XV. the society of France might be roughly divided between those who were privileged and those who were not.

The difference between the two classes was marked in various vexatious and unjust ways. The vexatious ways irritated the rich bourgeois and the unjust ways embittered the poor. It was vexatious to a rich Parisian that his man-servant might not wear livery, and it was embittering to a struggling peasant that he must pay heavy taxes while the lord of the castle paid almost none. "It is this inequality that we must set ourselves to remove," wrote an anonymous pamphleteer before revolution was thought of.

Now this inequality of the laws was made harder to bear because the number of nobles in France was so great. This was accounted for in three ways. All the descendants of a noble remained noble in each succeeding generation ; certain lands bore with them a title of nobility which passed to any new owner ; and so also did very many official posts.

First in importance came the nobility of the sword, that is, of the oldest families, so called because they always had carried and always had had the right to carry a sword. This *noblesse d'épée* were the descendants of the men who had conquered France, who had held it for their king and for themselves, and had defended the poorer men who had gathered round their castles. This was the class which Richelieu had found so troublesome, and which when robbed by him of its old sovereignty, was tempted to Court by honours and pensions. The richer among them were called the *grande noblesse* and the poorer the *petite noblesse*, and the difference was only one of wealth. But the *grande noblesse*, who could afford to leave their homes and make a display at Versailles, for a long time held all the important posts at Court, while the *petite noblesse* had to stay at home, poor and very proud.

After these came the *noblesse de robe*, judges in Parlement and their descendants, many of whom had bought land to which titles were attached. This class

included among its members the best educated, most earnest, and most highly respected men in the kingdom. There was also the *noblesse de finance*, descended from men who had transacted the Government money matters; and lastly, the *noblesse d'administration*, who sprang from families of Intendants.

These classes were not on equal terms, for a noble of the sword was as unwilling to associate with a noble of administration as with a bourgeois; but as regarded law and custom, all were alike distinguished from the untitled man.

It used to be a rule in the older days that no one might enter the king's service who was not a noble, but gradually as the king needed money and as the bourgeois grew richer and more ambitious, things changed, until at last everyone who entered the king's service thereby became noble. Apart from Court posts, M. Necker<sup>1</sup> computes that in 1780 there were four thousand offices in France the holding of which secured hereditary nobility. Over two thousand of these belonged to the law-courts, over seven hundred to the Bureaux de Finances, about fifty were held by provincial governors, and nine hundred by secretaries to the king. The last especially were created, not for the work to be done, but for the money men paid to be appointed.

They paid highly for the honour. Montesquieu

<sup>1</sup> Necker, *Administration de la Finance*, vol. iii. p. 145 seq.



in his *Lettres Persanes*, says : " The King of France has no gold mines like the King of Spain, his neighbour, but he has far greater wealth in the vanity of his subjects, which is more inexhaustible than any mine. He has been known to undertake or continue a war without any resource but the titles of honour he has to sell." Nobles bought for themselves posts which involved higher titles, while the middle class and lower middle class bought posts which would give any title.

There was a certain M. Caron, a French writer living in the last days of Louis XV. who was to become famous under Louis XVI. He was a barber's son and had no claim to noble descent, but his wife owned a little land, and he wished to add the title of her property to his name. He paid something like £400 to be made a secretary to the king and call himself Caron *de* Beaumarchais ; and in 1781, twenty years later, he wrote : " I can prove twenty years of nobility, and this title is really my own, on good parchment, sealed with the grand seal of yellow wax. . . . It is not like that of many persons, to be taken on trust—*I have my receipt.*" <sup>1</sup>

Now all these nobles, without distinction of rank, the oldest family among them and the barber's son who had his receipt, were alike privileged persons, that is to say they were freed in a very great

<sup>1</sup> Loménie, *Beaumarchais et son temps*, vol. i. p. 91.

measure from payment of taxes ; and the Church, which owned something like one third of the land in France, was also exempt. And it must be remembered that while the nobles as a class were privileged there were many privileged also among the middle class or *bourgeois*. For instance, the widows of the mole-catchers of the king's stud, the players of hautboys belonging to the king's stable, the widows of the shoemakers of the king's wardrobe, the veteran purveyors of the king's household, and others, benefited from exemptions. And besides these were officials employed in government service, advocates, lawyers, doctors, magistrates and town officials. "I have no doubt," says De Tocqueville, "that the number of those exempted was as great, and often greater, among the middle class than among the nobility."<sup>1</sup>

Taxation was of two kinds, direct and indirect, and of the direct taxes *taille* and *capitation* were the most important.

*Taille*<sup>2</sup> was a tax levied on land or on income derived from land ; in the first case it was called *réelle*, in the second *personnelle*. From both forms of this tax the clergy, nobles, and holders of office were exempt. The whole amount

<sup>1</sup> Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> See Diderot's *Encyclopédie* for full account of *Taille*.

required by Government was fixed by the Council, that to be contributed by each parish by the Intendant,<sup>1</sup> while the share each individual had to pay was decided by the collector,—a peasant chosen annually from among the parishioners. The total amount varied from year to year, and the peasants never knew what their *legal* share might be; the collector also changed and their *actual* share depended on his estimate of their ability to pay and on his friendly or unfriendly attitude towards each contributor. The evils of this system were greatly increased by the fact that the collector was held responsible “in his goods and his body,” for the whole amount assessed on his parish, and was thus driven to exaction to save himself from the ruin which nevertheless frequently followed his year of office,—and they were further aggravated by the absence of proper returns on which a just collector could base his calculations of the amount due by each contributor. Under these conditions the office of tax-collector, which had once been held in honour by the peasants, was now evaded “by every possible subterfuge.”<sup>2</sup>

After the *taille* came *capitation*.<sup>3</sup> This was a poll-tax on every subject in the land, from the Dauphin

<sup>1</sup> Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> See Savy, *Étude historique sur les impôts*, p. 22.



who was rated at two thousand francs, about £80, to the peasant who was rated at one franc—none was supposed to be exempt.<sup>1</sup> The theory was fair, but not so the practice, for, as De Tocqueville tells us, the privileged knew very well how to curry favour in high places and escape the tax, while the poor men had no opportunity of redress. Consequently the rich, especially in the provinces, paid less and less, and the poor paid more and more, until *capitation* became almost as burdensome as *taille*.

There was a third tax called the *vingtième*, or twentieth part of a franc, which the kings had it in their power to impose in time of war, and which was made more productive to the Government and more troublesome to the people from the fact that it was possible to impose a second or even a third *vingtième* at the same time.

Of indirect taxes the most burdensome were the *corvée* and the *gabelle*.

The *corvée* was a tax paid in compulsory labour. By it men were called upon to make roads, to build barracks, to transport military baggage, to convey convicts to prisons, and beggars to the dépôts of charity scattered over France, and to carry wood from the forests for the erection of public buildings.

From such labour the nobles and clergy, who

<sup>1</sup> Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 215.



could well spare servants, were exempt, but the man who worked his own farm must leave it, often at the most inconvenient seasons, and go where the *corvée* required. It was a terrible grievance. Twenty *sous* a-day for the use of his ox, five for his own or his man's food and labour, was a most inadequate recompense for being called away when the hay or corn or grape harvest was going on, and for the injury done his oxen by unmerciful treatment and long journeys.<sup>1</sup>

All peasants from childhood to old age were liable to this service, and liable to it every year. Here again the Intendant decided who should go and for how long. If he were a considerate man he did not force boys under sixteen or men over sixty years of age into the service, nor did he require more than twelve days work, six of which he arranged to fall in winter when the farmers had more leisure ; but the peasant had no security save in the character of the Intendant, and thirty, forty, or even fifty days out of the year were known to have been exacted.<sup>2</sup>

When royalty was concerned no mercy was shown. " I shall never forget," writes M. d'Argenson, " the horror of the calamities which France suffered on the coming of Marie Leczinska "—the wife of Louis XV. " Because of the incessant rains the harvest

<sup>1</sup> Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 465.

<sup>2</sup> Ducrocq, *La corvée des grands chemins*, p. 7 seq.

was not gathered in, and the poor agriculturist watched eagerly for a dry day to gather in the crops. But there was no one to gather them. The peasants were called away to mend the roads for the Queen"—which indeed were in much need of mending. "The horses of the Queen's waggons were exhausted. They ordered horses from the peasants for ten miles round to drag the luggage. The lords and ladies of her suite, seeing their own horses tired, took those of the peasants, paid the owners miserably, and did not feed the beasts at all. . . . I spoke to some of the poor peasants who with their horses harnessed were passing the night in the open air. Many of them told me that their animals had had nothing to eat during three days."<sup>1</sup> Such were some of the abuses of the *corvée*, but those of the *gabelle* were even more severe.

The *gabelle* was a tax on salt and a few other articles of food, but that on salt was by far the most important.

Salt was a government monopoly and therefore a dear article to buy;<sup>2</sup> but the law obliged every individual in France above seven years old to buy seven pounds a year, and these seven pounds were to be used exclusively for eating and cooking. If salt were wanted for other purposes more must

<sup>1</sup> Argenson, *Mémoires*, p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> See Savy, *Étude historique sur les impôts*, p. 140 seq.

be bought. The government built great stores in different districts of France<sup>1</sup> to keep the salt, and attached to each store was a large body of officials, who took care to know how many families there were in the district, how large these families were, and how much salt they bought. If they did not buy enough salt, if they smuggled or tried to make it at home, these officials were there to report on and punish the offenders.

The punishment was a fine for a first offence prison for a second, and for the confirmed offender the galleys. As many as three hundred peasants were yearly condemned to the galleys, and something like eighteen hundred sent to prison for evading the *gabelle*,<sup>2</sup> while smugglers bearing arms were flogged, branded, sent to the galleys for three, six, or nine years, and not infrequently hanged.<sup>3</sup> "The *gabelle*," wrote a generous-minded noble, "is of all taxes the most disastrous. It creates criminals, it impoverishes agriculture, for the price of salt is such that the farmer cannot afford it either for his cattle or his land, and the laws relating to it, though cruel and capricious, are yet ineffectual."<sup>4</sup> From this tax also many proprietors were exempt.

<sup>1</sup> Boiteau, *L'État de la France en 1789*, p. 351.

<sup>2</sup> Savy, *Etude historique sur les impôts*, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> See Arthur Young, *Travels in France*, Appendix on Revolution.

<sup>4</sup> See on this subject pamphlets in British Museum Collection. *Gabelle*. F.R. 532.



Such were the government taxes and the exemptions which made these taxes so unfair. But the peasant-proprietor was not yet free when these were paid, for he had still to meet what were called seignorial rights. These, like government taxes, were in themselves a perfectly just demand. The government tax was the price paid for law and order in the land, the seignorial rights stood in the place of rent. In both cases the hardship arose from the way in which these demands were made.

In olden days, when the nobles first granted to their poorer neighbours the use of the land which their own swords had won, they asked no rent, as they were glad enough to find men to plough and dig the rough ground and turn it to some good. They did not, however, feel willing to give up the land altogether, and therefore they demanded some service from their land-holders. It was often a very simple, sometimes even a ridiculous service. We hear of men holding their land on condition of presenting their lord with two doves once a year, and of a woman losing her right to inherit her father's property because she and her husband had not slept in her father's house on the first night after her marriage or for six months afterwards.<sup>1</sup> In many cases

<sup>1</sup> British Museum Collection, *Droits Féodaux ; Les Inconvénients des droits Féodaux*, 1776.



homage had to be paid when a man entered on a new farm ; in others he had to pay his lord a small fee when a farm changed hands ; in others again he had to give his lord a present either in goods or in money, whenever it might occur to that personage to ask it.<sup>1</sup> What the landlord insisted on, was some recognition of his right over the land he had let out.

For long years these rights were never disputed, and the French peasant, in spite of taxation, was the freest and most comfortable on the continent. Many held their land on copyhold, and were thereby allowed to bequeath or sell their land so long as the landlord's rights were respected, and so long as the landlords lived on their estates and saw and knew their peasants there was little complaint.

But when the nobles left their estates and went to live at Versailles the friendly bond was loosened and too frequently there grew up instead a spirit of exaction in the landlord, and a spirit of dull helpless resentment on the part of the peasant. For living was expensive at Versailles, and the nobles often needed money, and it occurred to them to seek it from the peasants. They remembered the old charters and the old conditions on which their land had been granted, and they knew that many of these conditions were unfulfilled, since landlord and tenant

<sup>1</sup> See on seignorial rights, Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 452 *seq.*

had alike forgotten what they were. So they employed local lawyers, not over-scrupulous perhaps, to seek out the charters and find old and curious conditions and demand a fine for those whose observance had been neglected. For example, it was probably a condition that the man who held his land by presenting two doves must present them on a certain day. The doves were remembered but the day forgotten, until suddenly the lawyer appeared and threatened loss of the land unless a fine were promptly paid. It was the unexpected revival of forgotten claims and the consequent uncertainty in which the peasant lived which made him bitter against the *seigneur*, and when the opportunity afterwards arose, eager to burn his lord's charters.

Over and above the dues by which a peasant held his land, there were other rights belonging to the landlords which had grown to be vexatious. These also had a sensible origin, but France had outgrown the usages which were helpful hundreds of years before. It was very convenient once that the *seigneur* kept a mill, an oven, a forge, a grape-press, and a slaughter-house on his estate, but now it was hindering and annoying to have to take the meal to be ground, the bread to be baked, the grapes to be pressed, and the horses to be shod by the landlord's servants, to pay him the fee, and to have as consolation the knowledge that you would not be kept

waiting *more* than twenty-four hours.<sup>1</sup> From all these annoyances the nobles and the clergy were exempt.

But the peasant had yet another enemy, and that was the chase. "The chase," said an order of Louis XIV., "is a noble exercise reserved for the pleasure of kings and of the nobility";<sup>2</sup> and for the pleasure of the kings and the nobility it was strictly kept, so strictly that it was illegal for the nobles even to grant permission to *roturier* or peasant-proprietor to shoot.<sup>3</sup> There was no game license, but if a farmer destroyed a rabbit or a pigeon he was considered a poacher, and was punished as such. For the first offence he was liable to a fine of one hundred francs, for the second to double the amount, and for the third was condemned to sit three hours in the pillory on the village market-day, after which he was banished from the district for three years.

And yet game-laws had been framed in a somewhat merciful spirit; it was decreed that no man was to suffer the utmost penalty of the law for any damage he might do, and the crops and vineyards of the agriculturist were protected by statute. A statute had provided that no one might hunt,

<sup>1</sup> Savy, *Étude historique sur les impôts*, p. 55 seq. See also *Les Inconvénients des droits Féodaux*, 1776.

<sup>2</sup> *Code de la Chasse*. See also Jullien, *La Chasse, son histoire et sa législation*, p. 267.

<sup>3</sup> Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 403.



whether on horseback or on foot, whether with dogs or falcons, on sown land from the time the corn was in stalk until harvest, nor in vineyards from the 1st of May until the gathering of the grapes, on penalty of forfeiting the right of the chase.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the practice was much less merciful than the theory of the game-laws. We read, as a remarkable act of consideration from the Duke of Orleans, that when hunting in a vineyard where the grapes were ripe he forbade his men to eat them.<sup>2</sup> The brothers of Louis XVI. the Counts of Provence and of Artois, were more destructive, for they used to order their coachmen to drive through fields of standing corn if convenience advised it ;<sup>3</sup> and because Marie Antoinette would not do this, but would rather miss "being in at the death," she was held up as a marvel of consideration.

The game-laws were the more vexatious to France, because that country is almost entirely agricultural, while in the neighbourhood of Paris they weighed more heavily than elsewhere, because of the vicinity of the king. There was, therefore, a sore temptation to be a poacher, and as poachers increased the law became more severe, until, writing in 1780, Mercier says that to kill a

<sup>1</sup> *Ordonnance de Louis XIV.*, 1669. See Jullien, p. 270.

<sup>2</sup> Bacourt, *Mirabeau et le Comte de la Marche*, vol. i. p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> Falloux, *Vie de Louis XVI.*, i. 19.



partridge is an offence which the galleys alone can expiate.<sup>1</sup>

M. Mercier was a Parisian of the Parisians, and the Parisians and their neighbours felt keenly the evils of the chase. All round Paris were royal palaces, and to each palace was attached a royal hunting-ground, called by the French a *capitainerie*. There were the Bois de Boulogne, the forests of Vincennes, of St. Germain, of Versailles, of Rambouillet, and, a little farther off, of Fontainebleau and Compiègne; while extending for about six miles in every direction from Paris itself was the Warren of the Louvre. All these were strictly preserved and a court was held in the Palace of the Louvre every week to try and to punish anyone who had infringed the laws of the *capitainerie*.<sup>2</sup> From its records alone we know that the articles made by Louis XIV. in 1669 regarding the chase were still in full force when Louis XVI. became king.

After the date of these articles, no one having property within the *capitainerie* might make a park or enclosure, and no ditches might be dug round property,<sup>3</sup> so that the farmer's fields were exposed to the ravages of game, and he had no redress. Again, whether the crops were ready to be cut down or not,

<sup>1</sup> Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, i. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Loménie, *Beaumarchais et son temps*, vol. i. p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> *Ordonnance de Louis XIV.*, 1669. See Jullien, p. 272.

they must stand as shelter to the game until the feast of St. John, the 24th June.<sup>1</sup> And the laws against the man who stole eggs from or set a snare in the *capitaineries* were cruel laws. Branding with a hot iron, flogging, and banishment from the neighbourhood for five years were among the punishments Louis XIV. had decreed *without exemption*.

Need we wonder if France grew restless and called for change!

<sup>1</sup> *Ordonnance de Louis XIV.*, 1657 et 1658. See Jullien, p. 272.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE 'PHILOSOPHES.'



ROUSSEAU.

WHEN Louis XV. was a child, he stood one day at the palace windows looking out on the gardens of the Tuilleries. There had been rumours in the capital of an attempt to poison the young king, and the people crowded round the palace eager to assure themselves

of his safety. The Maréchal de Villeroi stood by the boy. "See," he cried, "see these people; they are all yours—yours to do with what you will."<sup>1</sup> In this doctrine the king was educated and on it was based the system of finance pursued in the last years of his reign. The king needed money, and the people were his to do with what he would.

There are two ways in which to meet financial

<sup>1</sup>Guizot, *Histoire de France racontée à ses petits-enfants*, vol. v. p. 52.

difficulties : one is to lower expenses until covered by receipts, the other is to increase the receipts until they meet the expenses ; and the latter was much the more acceptable at court. It therefore was the way adopted by the Abbé Terray, minister of finance from 1769 to 1774, and it brought great misery on the poor. The burden already laid on the poorer taxpayers was ruthlessly increased, until the peasant, driven almost to despair, concealed the little he had, wore rags, lived miserably, and even begged, in the hope that the collector of taxes might value his property at even a little less than it was really worth. "What is the use of toiling," he cried, "if all goes to the collector?" Now, while such things were taking place in France—while the motto of sovereignty identified the state with the king, and the whole scheme of government carried out the maxim ; while the poor were regarded as a source of income whereby not only the proper needs of Government but also the pleasures and vices of the court might be supplied—there had arisen in France a set of men who taught a very different creed.

These men, who were called *philosophes*, were not all philosophers in the strict sense of the word, for they busied themselves with the laws and theories of agriculture, economics, finance, and above all of government, rather than with problems of thought. Everything, in fact, which affected the relations of



man to man and of man to nature interested the *philosophes*.

But it was the simple and natural relations of one man to another which interested the *philosophes*. "The sight of so many privileges, both mischievous and absurd, which pressed more and more heavily on society," says De Tocqueville, "forced the thought of the *philosophes* towards the idea of the natural equality of the essentials of life."<sup>1</sup> To them the peasant was as important as the king, and his rights more substantial than any conferred by privilege. The dignity of man as man was acknowledged, and in this lay the chief significance of the teaching of the *philosophes*.

The theory of Versailles and the theories of the *philosophes* were thus at utter variance, and no attempt was made to harmonise the one with the other. This arose mainly from the fact that government was a matter entirely separate from the daily life of the nation. There was no public press, no political liberty; the writers who theorised on matters of government "had no part in it, and could not see the part taken by those who had."<sup>2</sup> They did not know the practical difficulties which ministers had to meet, nor did they realise the dangers which change, even the most needful, is sure to bring. They were, therefore, "far more bold in innovation than if they

<sup>1</sup> Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p. 229.

had had practical experience of politics.”<sup>1</sup> With a free hand and without fear of consequences the *philosophes* attacked every existing institution, every daily custom, and even popular beliefs.

Of these men Rousseau and Voltaire were the most celebrated, and while the one shook the old order by his mocking wit, the other loosened its hold by proposing one altogether new. Where Voltaire used an epigram, Rousseau urged a natural law, and on natural laws he based his theory of society. Everyone, Rousseau declared, had equal rights, but everyone is not equally able to secure these rights, and society must therefore agree to some scheme which would defend the weak from the strong; in other words, it must agree to be governed. Government, then, in his eyes, is a system created for the good and convenience of those governed, and its one value consists in allowing each man to enjoy his rights and develop his resources to the utmost possible extent; it was, he said, a “Social Contract,” or an arrangement made by society for its own advantage.

Now in such a scheme a king is at best but an accident, and very far indeed from being himself the state, and what Rousseau taught, other writers developed. Helvétius, his contemporary, declared openly that the true centre of government was to be

<sup>1</sup> Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 230.

found in the will of the people, and not at Versailles or in the "good pleasure" of the king.

And Rousseau did not confine himself to theories on politics; he applied his test of natural law to society as well. In the eighteenth century society was formal and artificial; men loved cities and looked on the country as a desert, mothers thought it beneath their dignity to nurse their children, and it was even, wrote Michelet, unfashionable to fall in love.<sup>1</sup> On such a society Rousseau launched his romance, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, in which he pictured the delights of a simple life, of country pleasures and of obedience to natural instincts with such charm that to be artificial ceased to be the *mode*. "Women of the first fashion in France are now ashamed of not nursing their own children, and stays are universally proscribed from the bodies of the poor infants. . . . Everybody that have country-seats are at them; and those who have none visit others who have," wrote Arthur Young in 1787, and to the "magic of Rousseau's writings"<sup>2</sup> he attributes these changes and the new attitude in society of which they were an index.

And while Rousseau wrote of the rights of man without respect of persons, of simple tastes and natural feelings, Voltaire was attacking abuses in high

<sup>1</sup> Michelet, *Histoire de France*, vol. xix. p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> See Arthur Young, *Travels in France*.



places. He accused the Parlement of Paris of a desire to become a political power rather than a court of justice, and stripped from it the mask of disinterestedness by which he declared it deceived the public.

It was, however, towards the Church that Voltaire showed himself most merciless. "It must be acknowledged," writes De Tocqueville, "that the Church was not more open to attack in France than elsewhere. The corruptions and abuses which had been allowed to creep into it were less, on the contrary, than in most Catholic countries."<sup>1</sup> But Voltaire and the *philosophes* generally were not occupied in finding out what was good in the Church or in any old institution, but in imagining new ones, and the Church was judged by its fitness or unfitness to form a part in their projected schemes. "The Church rested principally upon tradition; they professed great contempt for all institutions based upon respect for the past. The Church recognised an authority superior to individual reason; they appealed to nothing but that reason. The Church was founded upon an hierarchy; they aimed at an entire subversion of rank."<sup>2</sup> The Church, therefore, was condemned—Church and Government and Society were weighed in the balance and found wanting.

<sup>1</sup> Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 244.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p. 276 *seq.*



To remedy these evils was not, as has been said, the immediate effort of the *philosophes*. They did not suggest reform, and had no care to preserve the old. The political changes they proposed were unconnected with what already existed in France, and for that reason were not of much practical value. What these men did was to assert the right of every subject to equal laws, to give expression to the discontent of the country, and to arouse its imagination until at length it fancied all old things intolerable and all new things possible and good.

But this was not yet, and we must now leave old systems and new ideas and turn to the story of events.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE AUSTRIAN ALLIANCE.



MARIA-THERESA.

IN the month of October, 1740, Charles VI., King of Bohemia and Hungary and Emperor of Germany lay dying in his palace at Vienna.<sup>1</sup>

He was the last of a long line which had for four hundred years, without a break in the male succession, ruled over the great and scattered possessions of the House of Austria. His only son was dead, and a woman was his heir.

During the last years of his reign his great object had been to persuade the German princes, over whom as Emperor he had control, to sign a deed, which changed the ancient law and allowed

<sup>1</sup> Broglie, *Frédéric II. et Marie-Thérèse*, vol. i. p. 64.

a woman to succeed. This deed was called a Pragmatic Sanction,<sup>1</sup> and had been acknowledged by all the great European Powers.

There was no lack of other claimants. The King of Spain, the Elector of Bavaria, and the Elector of Saxony all three held themselves, by right of birth or of marriage, heirs to the Austrian dominions; but Charles wished his dominions to remain under the rule of the Hapsburgs, and had recognised his daughter's capacity to govern.

Maria-Theresa was only twenty-three years old, and she knew the prejudice of the proud Austrian nobles against a woman's rule. She knew also that her husband, Francis, Grand Duke of Lorraine, was unpopular in Vienna. Should she fail to establish her position in her own court, all would be lost, and the House of Hapsburg would cease to be a reigning family in Europe.

It was at two o'clock on the morning of October 26th that Charles died. His daughter, then in delicate health, was carried fainting from his room; but immediately on recovering consciousness, she gave notice to the State officials that she would receive

<sup>1</sup>A Pragmatic Sanction is an order concerning affairs of Church or State. French history records four great Pragmatic Sanctions. That of St. Louis in 1269, relating to taxes on church property; that of Charles VII. in 1438, on the orders issued by the Council of Basle; this of Charles VI. of Hungary; and a fourth issued in 1767, by Charles III. of Spain, for the expulsion of the Jesuits.

their homage that day. At the appointed hour she received the oaths of allegiance, confirmed the Ministers in their posts, and prayed that they would show her the faithfulness they had shown her father. She ordered all documents to be drawn up in her name as Queen of Bohemia and Hungary and Archduchess of Austria, and summoned a meeting of her Privy Council to be held next day.<sup>1</sup>

On that occasion her husband sat by her; before her were the councillors, not one under sixty, and educated in prejudice against a woman's rule. Yet they confirmed her position, and after a time acknowledged her husband as reigning with her;—so great were her charm and the force of her character.

But Maria-Theresa's work was only just begun. The year which made her Queen of Bohemia had made Frederick, afterwards called the Great, King of Prussia. He was twenty-eight years old when he came to the throne; he had a great army, a small kingdom, and was boundlessly ambitious. His kingdom was new as well as small, and he wished to give it a name in Europe and to make himself felt as a ruler. His readiest way was a war, and he did not hesitate to force a quarrel on the young girl only three months a queen, whose rights he was bound to protect. In January, 1741,

<sup>1</sup> Broglie, *Frédéric II. et Marie-Thérèse*, vol. i. p. 69.



he marched into the Austrian province of Silesia, and had seized it before Maria-Theresa really believed that he meant to be her enemy.<sup>1</sup>

She was sorely bested. Frederick's treachery to the Pragmatic Sanction was followed by the defection of the other princes concerned; France, the hereditary enemy of Austria, sided with Prussia, and on the 11th September, 1741, before she had been queen a year Maria-Theresa told the Hungarian Diet that her own and her child's lives were in danger. Only a few weeks before, Hungary had crowned her Queen. After coronation it was the custom for Hungarian sovereigns to ride up a little hill called the Mont Royal, and there point a sword north, south, east and west in token of their determination to defend their country from danger come from what quarter it might. As the young queen drew her sword from its scabbard, a shout had risen from the thousands standing by: "Long live Maria-Theresa! long live our *king*!"<sup>2</sup> and now the graver voices of the councillors exclaimed, *Vitam et sanguinem consecramus*, "Our blood and our life we consecrate."<sup>3</sup>

From that day the allegiance of her people was secure, and supported her in a struggle which threatened not only the loss of Silesia, but her own

<sup>1</sup> Broglie, *Frédéric II. et Marie-Thérèse*, vol. i. p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. ii. p. 42 *seq.*

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, vol. ii. p. 54.

succession. Silesia she did lose in 1742, but she silenced all claimants to her throne, and in 1745, saw her husband, Francis of Lorraine, acknowledged Emperor of Germany. But the loss of her province was very bitter to the Queen, who could not, we are told, see a Silesian without tears filling her eyes, and to recover this territory became an ambition never long absent from her thoughts. The ambition brought about a change of policy which affected European relations, and had its influence in the fall of the old regime in France.<sup>1</sup>

When Frederick first invaded Austria, France and Prussia were allies against England, Austria, and Holland, and before the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle was signed in 1748 all these powers had taken part in the quarrel. After the peace, writes the Duc de Broglie, all the allies were discontented with each other. Frederick would willingly have exchanged the French alliance for one with England, while England was lukewarm towards Austria, and Austria, "thinking only of reconquering Silesia," in which enterprise England did not care to help her, was ready to give up her old ally.

As early as 1749 Maria-Theresa began to wonder whether she could not turn the ancient

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the Franco-Austrian treaty see Broglie, *Études diplomatiques, L'alliance autrichienne*.

enemy of her house into her ally, and wrote to the grand dignitaries of her court to ask their opinion. They all, excepting the Count Kaunitz, afterwards her chief minister, disapproved of the scheme. But the Empress-queen was not daunted. Austria must have some ally, and England was showing herself too friendly with Frederick to be trusted long; France, like Austria, was a Catholic power, and was predominant in northern Europe as Austria was in southern. To secure the alliance of France would restore to Austria the prestige of which the growing power of Frederick threatened to deprive her, and was more than likely to bring with it the restoration of Silesia. Maria-Theresa sent Kaunitz as ambassador to Versailles.

But France was perhaps more anti-Austrian than ever Austria had been anti-French, and Kaunitz returned to Vienna having made several friends at the Court of Versailles, and sown seed which might some day bear fruit, but having learned also that to such an alliance there would be strong opposition.

Meantime the Empress and her minister watched, and in 1755 judged that events were ripe for further action. Frederick was on the point of breaking with France and of becoming the ally of England, and at once Maria-Theresa opened up negotiations with Versailles.



A proposal was drawn up and sent to M. de Staremborg, the Austrian Ambassador in Paris, who was to use his own discretion as to the person who should submit it to the king. He chose Madame de Pompadour,<sup>1</sup> mistress of Louis XV., and then paramount in court influence, and she selected the Abbé de Bernis as the minister best fitted to carry the proposal to a successful issue. The first conference was held in a little house at Bellevue on the Seine, several miles from the capital, and so necessary was secrecy that the three persons concerned—the ambassador, the minister, and the lady—each took a different route to a rendezvous from which even the servants had been carefully sent out of the way.<sup>2</sup>

Negotiations, however, were slow. The French minister foresaw that an alliance which involved a change of European politics must be unpopular; he foresaw also a war with Prussia, which would become a general war because of the alarm which the alliance of the two great Catholic powers would cause to Protestants, and in this war he looked for no benefit to France.

But Louis differed from his minister. He did not expect war, and though a bad man was a good

<sup>1</sup> Maria-Theresa has been accused of writing a flattering letter to Madame de Pompadour, but this is a fiction of Frederick.

<sup>2</sup>For an account of the preliminaries of treaty see *Mémoires et Lettres de F. I. de Pierre, Cardinal de Bernis, 1715-1758*, par F. Masson, vol. i. p. 222 seq.



Catholic. He had all his life, he declared, wished for an alliance with Austria, he admired Maria-Theresa, and he looked upon this alliance as the one means of maintaining the Catholic religion and of preserving peace in Europe. On the 1st of May, 1756, the negotiations, begun in 1755, ended in a treaty whereby France, for two centuries and a half the recognised rival of Austria, became her ally.

Prussia at once allied herself with England ; the Abbé de Bernis, and not the king, proved the true prophet. Immediately on the change of allies there broke out the great European war known as the Seven Years' War. By it France lost and England gained Canada, the Philippine Islands, and large tracts in India, and the Austrian alliance was less popular than ever in France. Nor did Maria-Theresa regain her lost province. Her failure to recover Silesia only made her more anxious than before to maintain her friendship with France. She looked on the alliance as one of the triumphs of her reign, and would have considered its loss as a humiliation only second to that of Silesia. To strengthen it was her constant policy, and in the royal nursery at Schönbrunn,—the country palace near Vienna,—she saw a possibility of a closer tie than that of politics between Vienna and Versailles.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE AUSTRIAN MARRIAGE.



CHOISEUL.

ON the 23rd of August, 1754, Louis-Auguste, Duc de Berry, the third son of Louis, Dauphin of France, and grandson of Louis XV., was born in the Palace of Versailles. As the messenger rode to take the news to the French Court, then at the country palace of

Choisy, the horse stumbled and threw its rider, who was killed.<sup>1</sup> On the 2nd of November, 1755, little more than a year later, the Archduchess Marie-Antoinette-Joséphine-Jeanne, ninth child of Francis and Maria-Theresa, was born in Vienna, and on the same day Lisbon was overthrown by an earthquake. Superstitious people in a

<sup>1</sup> Falloux, *Vie de Louis XVI.*, p. 4.

superstitious age prophesied evil for both these children.

But at their birth, evil seemed far enough distant. Neither was born to great responsibilities, and both were blessed with good parents. Unlike Louis XV. Louis the Dauphin was a good husband, a good father, and a good man. He cared for the welfare of the people, and refused to be too much trammelled by court etiquette. As he leant one day on the balcony of the country palace of Bellevue, his eyes fixed on the capital lying spread out before him, a courtier exclaimed, "M. le Dauphin looks thoughtful." "I was thinking," replied the prince, "of the joy which a sovereign ought to feel in having the happiness of so many in his power."<sup>1</sup>

At the same time the Dauphin was bigoted and hostile to the ideas which were then influencing France. He disliked the *philosophes*, whereas the Jesuits, who were working mischief in the state, had his sympathy; the new alliance was to him an abomination, for he held to tradition in Church and State.

The Austrian Emperor was more liberal in his ideas, but shared with the Dauphin a keen sense of the responsibilities of government. It is from the *Instructions* written for his children that we know the Emperor Francis' views. "We are not in the

<sup>1</sup> Regnault, *La dauphine Marie-Josèphe de Saxe*, p. 247.

world only to amuse ourselves, but to work out our own salvation and to fulfil the duties of the rank in which God has placed us. . . . It is a principal care of the sovereign to see that his people be not overburdened in order to supply his luxury. . . . It is character founded on religion that commands respect. . . . All are equal before God."<sup>1</sup> Such was the Emperor's teaching.

Francis had brought to the proud Austrian Court traditions of a family life which preferred simplicity to ostentation and etiquette. He used his influence in getting rid of ceremony whenever possible, and succeeded in banishing it from the private life of the Royal family. In the midst of a court, they lived, we are told, as simply as if they were only citizens of Vienna. They dressed quietly, and the Emperor's carriage took its place contentedly among others, when going to the opera.<sup>2</sup> Especially at Schönbrunn was etiquette thrown aside. The children spent much time there, and were taught to visit their poor neighbours and do them such little kindnesses as they could; the palace grounds were open to all, and when the Emperor and Empress were there the peasants were encouraged to speak to them on any matter for which they might wish redress.

<sup>1</sup> *Instruction pour mes enfans. Recherches historiques*, par le Comte Horace Viel-Castel.

<sup>2</sup> Armaillé, *Marie-Thérèse et Marie-Antoinette*, p. 33.



Marie-Antoinette and her future husband were happy in their early training, but in the year 1765 when the little Archduchess was in her tenth and Louis-Auguste in his eleventh year, the Austrian Emperor and the French Prince died, and the children in losing their fathers might almost be said to have lost their mothers also. When the Dauphin died, his widow gave herself up to grief. She cut off her long hair and laid it in her husband's coffin, that, as she said, something of herself might be buried in his tomb.<sup>1</sup> On the walls of her bed-chamber, draped according to the etiquette of court mourning, in sad-coloured gray, she hung portraits of her husband, and if Madame Campan be correct, she caused a picture to be painted representing the Dauphin as he lay on his death-bed. This picture, draped like her walls in gray, was arranged at the bottom of her bed, so that her eyes might rest on it before she slept and again as soon as she waked.<sup>2</sup> Her one comfort, wrote the Dauphiness to her friend the Archbishop of Sens, would be to weep on her husband's tomb, her one desire, to prepare herself to join him in death.<sup>3</sup> Yet her devotion to the memory of her husband was not wholly spent in grief, for she set herself

<sup>1</sup> Regnault, *La dauphine Marie-Josèphe de Saxe*, p. 261.

<sup>2</sup> Madame Campan, *Memoirs*, Intro. xxvi. vol. i. English edition.

<sup>3</sup> Regnault, *La dauphine Marie-Josèphe de Saxe*, p. 263.

to prepare an elaborate scheme of education for her children in accordance with his wishes. The scheme was just complete and she herself beginning to resume her place in court life when her wish was granted, and in March, 1767, little more than a year after her husband, she too died.

Maria-Theresa was of sterner stuff. She mourned the Emperor and mourned sincerely, but she threw the whole energy of her nature into action. More than ever she was obliged to give her thoughts to politics. The Archduke Joseph succeeded his father as Emperor, but Maria-Theresa ruled with him and took her full share of responsibility. Her younger children could see little of her. They had their own establishment at Schönbrunn, where governors and governesses superintended their education, and where their mother visited them once a week. Her children were thought for with great care, but they had not from their mother the expression of affection it had been their father's joy to give. Their lot, however, was happy compared with that of the children at Versailles, who living under the same roof as their grandfather were indeed orphaned. They were five in number, Louis-Auguste, Duc de Berry; Louis-Stanislas, Comte de Provence; Charles, Comte d'Artois; and two little girls, Clotilde and Elisabeth. Louis-Auguste was now Dauphin, as his two elder brothers had died, but though he no care was taken

to train the boy in kingly qualities. His grandfather left him to his tutors, his grandmother only lived a few months after her daughter-in-law; his four aunts, Mesdames Adélaïde, Victoire, Sophie, and Louise, were too indolent or too busy in selfish ambitions or selfish piety to care for their brother's children. Madame Adélaïde, indeed, to whom their mother had confided her "orphans," took some interest, but Madame Adélaïde was overbearing, unamiable, and ambitious. She wished the young Dauphin to love and respect her; but her wish was selfish, for she aimed at gaining such an influence over him as would one day give her importance in France.

Her brother, the late Dauphin, had appointed the Duc de la Vauguyon as Governor of his sons, and he, after the death of the Dauphiness, had sole charge of the young princes. The Duke, like his master, was strongly anti-Austrian, and in this prejudice Madame Adélaïde shared. Although a religious man, he was very vain and not very wise. There was an under-governor, a tutor and an under-tutor, but not one of these seems to have gained the love of his charges. Yet the Dauphin and his brothers were well educated, they were taught Latin, Italian, German, and English; but the study which the Dauphin loved most was geography.

He was a shy awkward boy, inclined to shrink from society and thinking very little of his own



abilities. His brothers, cleverer than he, attracted more attention at court, and even as children made a greater stir. "Why do you not stamp about and make a noise like Provence and d'Artois?" Madame Adélaïde is said to have asked her silent nephew. "It is not I who am clever, it is my brother of Provence,"<sup>1</sup> the Dauphin once said when a nobleman from the country made him complimentary remarks. Thought little of by himself, by his brothers, and by the Court, treated by his grandfather as little better than a fool, the boy found his own amusements in carpentering, lock-making, and the chase. It was a solitary life amidst the multitudes of Versailles.

How soon Maria-Theresa conceived the idea of marrying her youngest daughter to the Dauphin we do not know, but her anxiety to cement the alliance with France is proved by a project of making her third daughter, the Archduchess Marie-Elizabeth, the second wife of Louis XV.<sup>2</sup> For a good woman to think of sacrificing her daughter to a character such as that of Louis is indicative of the place the French alliance held in the heart of the Empress. Happily for the Archduchess the idea was abandoned.

A little later, when Marie-Antoinette was about

<sup>1</sup> Falloux, *Vie de Louis XVI.*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète du Comte de Mercy avec l'Empereur Joseph II., et le Prince de Kaunitz.* Mercy à Kaunitz, 1st Nov., 1768.



eleven years old, a certain Madame Geoffrin, a lady whose salon was one of the most noted in Paris at that time, passed through Vienna, and was most kindly received at Court. The Empress presented her daughters to her guest, who, on seeing the youngest, exclaimed: "Ah! that is a child I should like to take with me to France." "Take her if you will," said Maria-Theresa, and added, more seriously: "Tell your friends in France what you think of the little one."<sup>1</sup>

Events in France favoured the Empress, for the most influential Minister at Versailles was the Duc de Choiseul, Minister of Foreign Affairs, a statesman who was favourably inclined to Austria, believing that as things then stood in Europe the alliance with Austria was a strength to France. To the Duc de Choiseul the late Dauphin had been bitterly opposed, and the Duc de la Vauguyon, as Governor to the royal children, had been careful that the father's feeling should live on in the son. But the father was dead, the Governor was powerless against the king and his minister, and the feeling of the young Dauphin was not held of much account. When therefore Choiseul suggested a marriage between Austria and France as a means of strengthening the alliance, there was nothing for it but to submit. In July, 1769, when the young Dauphin

<sup>1</sup> Gleichen, *Mémoires*, p. 110.

was fifteen and Marie-Antoinette fourteen years old, the arrangement was made.

The Dauphin was not possessed of very lively affections, but he had seen a portrait of his future bride, and had admired it, while the Empress had taught her daughter to regard a marriage with the French heir as the highest pinnacle of earthly grandeur. The French king was always spoken of with respect, French books and trinkets were bestowed on Marie-Antoinette, and a French tutor, the Abbé de Vermond, brought to Vienna.

The Abbé found a somewhat lazy and very inattentive pupil, and he was obliged to suit his instruction to the self-indulgent habit of mind he found it impossible to overcome. The lessons in the religion, history, and literature of France which it was his task to give, the special instruction on the great families frequenting the French Court, on the usages and etiquette which prevailed at Versailles, often took the form of easy talks, in which the teacher related and the pupil questioned. The method had its advantages, but it failed to correct the habit of inattention, which was the greatest defect in the education of the Archduchess.

But if Marie-Antoinette was careless, she was very charming. She had learned the lesson of consideration to those beneath her which her father had impressed on her and all his children. She

had kindly impulse, a quick understanding, clear insight, and a just judgment; and the Abbé looked forward hopefully to a brilliant future for the young girl whose counsellor he was to be.

On the evening of April the 16th, 1770, Maria-Theresa and her son, Joseph II., received the Marquis de Durfort, French Ambassador at Vienna, and granted the demand made in his master's name for the hand of Marie-Antoinette in marriage to the heir-apparent.<sup>1</sup> Next day, in the great Council Chamber, in presence of her mother, her brother, and the councillors, Marie-Antoinette took the oath by which, on the eve of marriage with a foreign prince, an Archduchess of Austria must renounce all right to Austrian succession.<sup>2</sup>

It was at half-past nine on the morning of April 21st that Marie-Antoinette left her home. She was very popular in the city as well as at the Court of Vienna, and the streets were crowded to see her go. The people watched the carriages which were to convey her and her suite to the French frontier until they had passed out of the city gate and were far on the northern road, and then turned home. "It was long," says a partial looker-on, "ere the capital was itself again."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Gazette de France*, 4th May, 1770.

<sup>2</sup> See *Gazette de France*, 11th May, 1770.

<sup>3</sup> Weber, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 17. Weber was the foster-brother and devoted servant of Marie-Antoinette.



Travelling was slow in those days, and it was the 7th of May before the Austrian princess reached the dividing-line between her own and her adopted land. She was to enter France at Strasburg, and in a pavilion built on a little island in the middle of the Rhine was to exchange her Austrian for her French suite. The pavilion consisted of a large hall, out of which opened on either side a smaller room, and French and Germans had vied with one another in making it beautiful.

From the rich stores of the crown—the Garde Meuble—were sent old tapestries to hang upon the walls. The Lutheran University sent a dais and chair covered with crimson velvet and gold lace; the Catholic cathedral, a crimson velvet carpet; the Prince of Lorraine, representative of Marie-Antoinette's father's family, a rich table-cloth for the great centre table; the wealthy inhabitants of the city contributed chairs and stools, while the poorer ones had to content themselves by making the pavilion the object of their evening walk and watching its completion with interested eyes.<sup>1</sup>

The morning on which their future queen was to enter France was cloudy, but as the Austrian carriages slowly crossed the bridge which separated her from the mother-land, and Marie-Antoinette, bright, winning, beautiful, and dignified, acknowledged

<sup>1</sup> Armaillé, *Marie-Thérèse et Marie-Antoinette*, p. 82.



the reception given her, the people were content. And now the Archduchess had a strange ceremony to perform. Having exchanged Austria for France, French etiquette demanded that she must also exchange her Austrian clothes for those of her adopted country ; and that ere she left the smaller hall, on the Austrian side of the pavilion, and set foot on French soil, everything she wore must be French. She had therefore to undress and dress again in clothes sent her from Paris.<sup>1</sup>

Thus attired, she was taken into the central hall, where the Comte de Noailles and other officials awaited her, and where documents were read and signed by which the charge of the Archduchess was resigned by her Austrian to her French escort. This done, the doors of the side-rooms were thrown open, and while her French ladies came forward to welcome her, the Austrians waited to bid her farewell.

Marie-Antoinette gave a quick glance as the French ladies entered, and singling out the Comtesse de Noailles, who was to be her chief lady-in-waiting, begged her to counsel and to guide her. Then she turned to her Austrians, who kissed her hand, and charging them with messages to her mother, her sisters, and her friends, she threw her arms affectionately round these, her old attendants, and in her mother-tongue wished them well. With

<sup>1</sup> D'Oberkirch, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 32.

ready courtesy she then turned to her French suite. "Pardon me," she said, smiling through her tears; "if I used German, it was for the friends and the country that I leave. Henceforth I shall never forget that I am French."<sup>1</sup>

A week had yet to pass before Marie-Antoinette should see her bridegroom. French kings and princes did not travel much in those days, and the meeting was arranged to take place near the royal palace at Compiègne, about fifty miles north-east of Paris. On the 14th of May, after a journey which was an uninterrupted welcome, the Archduchess left the Bishop's Palace at Soissons and drove from it along the road to Compiègne.

Near the village of Berne, at a spot called the Pont de Berne, where a bridge crosses the river Aisne, Marie-Antoinette's officers saw the procession of the French king approach.

The young girl alighted from her carriage, and, accompanied by Madame de Noailles, went forward to meet the king. He also left his carriage, and when Marie-Antoinette knelt before him, raised her and embraced her tenderly.<sup>2</sup> Standing by, awkward and uncomfortable, suspicious of aught that was Austrian, yet interested and pleased, was the Dauphin. To him the king presented his future

<sup>1</sup> D'Oberkirch, *Mémoires*, p. 33, and *Gazette de France*, May 11th, 1770.

<sup>2</sup> *Gazette de France*, 21st May, 1770.



LOUIS XVI.

*From Collection of Prints of Louis XVI. in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.*





wife, and he, "according to etiquette,"<sup>1</sup> kissed her on the cheek. Mesdames the aunts kissed her also, Madame Adélaïde observing all with critical eyes, for, "Had I been consulted," she had said, "I should never have sought a Dauphiness in Austria."<sup>1</sup>

Yet even she was pleased: there was an indefinable charm about the Archduchess to which none who saw her seems to have been insensible—Englishmen, Swedes, Americans, Russians, and more difficult than these to please, the courtiers of her adopted country felt it.

Two days later, on the 16th May, in the royal chapel at Versailles, Louis-Auguste, Dauphin of France, and Marie-Antoinette, Archduchess of Austria, were married with much state and rejoicing.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> *Gazette de France*, 21st May, 1770, and La Rocheterie, *Histoire de Marie-Antoinette*, vol. i. p. 32 *seq.* M. de la Rocheterie's Life of Marie-Antoinette is translated into English, and may be accepted as a standard work.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE COURT.



MESDAMES ADÉLAÏDE AND VICTOIRE.

“THE Court of Versailles,” wrote the Austrian minister, “is a mass of intrigues and cabals: in it honesty and straightforward dealing do not exist.”<sup>1</sup>

For this the character of Louis XV. was largely to blame. He had never been known to give a direct reproof to his children; and the weak dislike to place himself in a position which might prove unpleasant, led him to suffer intrigue, tricks and disorders to go on at Court unheeded by him. Indolent and self-indulgent, it was his habit to affect to avoid all responsibility. “They would have it so,” he used to say of the measures

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. i. p. 154.

his ministers proposed to him. "If I were only head of the police," remarked this king, head of everything, "I would put down *cabriolets*, they are dangerous to the public." With him, to all appearance, great things were small and small things great. His most serious business was the hunt. He liked exactitude in unimportant details; on the first of January he noted in his almanack the day on which he meant to leave Versailles for Compiègne, for Choisy, and for Fontainebleau.<sup>1</sup> He was particular in making his own coffee from trees grown with the greatest care in his hot-houses; he was expert in breaking the eggs he ate.<sup>2</sup>

And yet Louis XV. had not lost his kingly bearing nor that glance of his blue eye which could make his courtiers tremble, and if he chose he could assert himself. His ministers knew well a certain trembling of his chin which told that the king meant to have his way,<sup>3</sup> and his secret correspondence, maintained by means of agents at the different courts of Europe, shows Louis no mere cipher in European politics.

Among the many parties which found a home in the French Court three were predominant at

<sup>1</sup>The Court left Versailles each year for Compiègne in the middle of July and remained until the last week of August, and for Fontainebleau in the first week of October until the middle of November.

<sup>2</sup>Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 16 *seq.*

<sup>3</sup>Besenal, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 270.

the time of the Dauphin's marriage—these were those of the Dubarry, of the Devout, and of the Duc de Choiseul, favourer of the Austrian alliance.

When Marie-Antoinette came to Versailles the king was a man of sixty years of age. Madame de Pompadour had died in 1764, and his gentle, undemanding wife, Marie-Leczinska, of Poland, in 1767. In 1769 Madame Dubarry had been officially recognised as Madame de Pompadour's successor, and in 1770 took up her abode in the "*appartements des maîtresses*," a set of rooms above those of her royal lover.<sup>1</sup> Here Madame Dubarry ruled. Her favour was a passport to the king's, her influence was the moving force in the Court, it determined the fate of ministers and the selection of ladies-in-waiting to the Dauphiness. The crowd which gathered round her and paid her homage had no marked politics—it was made up of those who wished to gain favour, to retain office, or secure some private end.

Yet the Dubarry party had political significance. Conspicuous among its adherents was the Duc d'Aiguillon, then Minister of War. Ambitious and vindictive, he upheld the interests of the nobles as a privileged class, whose acts might not be criticised. But his own acts had been criticised; he had been

<sup>1</sup> Nolhac, *Château de Versailles*, p. 36.



tried by the parlement of his own province and by that of Paris for certain deeds of misgovernment in Brittany, and only the direct interference of the king had saved him. He therefore avowed himself an enemy to the parlements and to their supporters, of whom the Duc de Choiseul was the most prominent. It thus became the object of d'Aiguillon and of the Dubarry party to compass the fall of Choiseul. With them were the Abbé Terray, the unscrupulous Minister of Finance, and M. de la Vrillière, the equally unscrupulous Minister of the King's Household.

On the ground-floor of the palace in rooms looking out on the terrace of the *parterre du nord*<sup>1</sup> lived the king's daughters, Mesdames Adélaïde, Victoire, and Sophie, while Madame Louise, the youngest daughter, took refuge early in 1770 in the Carmelite convent of St. Denis. The princesses led a dull and quiet life. They sat at their tapestry frames while their reader read aloud. Fond of cultivating flowers, they had only window-boxes in which to indulge their taste; fond of walking, as princesses they might not leave the palace-grounds.<sup>2</sup> Their father paid them a daily perfunctory visit, but they disapproved of the Dubarry, and from the day she took up residence in

<sup>1</sup> Nolhac, *Château de Versailles*, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 22.

the palace the king and his daughters drifted farther and farther apart.

To Madame Victoire, good-natured and indolent, and to Madame Sophie, insignificant and morose, the intrigues of the palace were matters of gossip or indifference, but it was not so with Madame Adélaïde, who, in her dreary rooms, turned to intrigue as the chief interest of her life. The princesses ranged themselves with the Devout party, which had, for one of its tenets, hatred of the Dubarry and her set.

Right at the extremity of the south wing of the palace<sup>1</sup> were the apartments devoted to the royal children and their Governess. The post of Governess was one held in high esteem, and was also one of the most influential at court. The present occupant was Madame de Marsan, a lady of the proud Rohan family and aunt of the afterwards notorious Cardinal. To her charge all the children of the late Dauphin had been committed—the boys while so young as to require a woman's care, and the girls until old enough to be provided with a household of their own. She it was who was recognised as head of the Devout, and in full sympathy with her was the Duc de la Vauguyon, still Governor of the Dauphin's brothers, Louis-Stanislas and Charles.

<sup>1</sup> Nolhac, *Château de Versailles*, p. 66.

This party was originally called the Devout, not because of its righteous horror of the Dubarry, but because some years before it had espoused the side of the Jesuits against the Government. The Jesuits had proved mischievous in France as in other European countries at that time, and were in 1764 expelled from the country at the instigation of the parlements and with the approval of the Duc de Choiseul. The act created a holy horror in the minds of devout Catholics, notably in that of the late Dauphin, and the state of feeling then excited was carefully cherished by all who loved his memory. Because of this act Madame Adélaïde, Madame de Marsan, and the Duc de la Vauguyon regarded Choiseul as an enemy of religion, and, hating him even more than Madame Dubarry, did not hesitate to join hands with her if they could compass his fall. The Devout party was also as strongly anti-Austrian as it was pro-Jesuit; it was in short the party of the old regime.

The third party, that of the Duc de Choiseul, was the party of reform. The word is indeed too strong, but all that there was of Liberalism in the government of France was represented by Choiseul and his friends. In the matter both of the Jesuits and of the Austrian alliance he had forsaken the traditional policy, and though not himself great, sympathised with the great men whose writings



were exercising an influence on France. But though respected abroad and trusted in the country he was hated at Court. He had identified himself with the Parlements against a great noble, he had opposed the late Dauphin, and was too proud to pay homage to the Dubarry.

With his party Marie-Antoinette took her stand. It was Choiseul who had brought about her marriage ; dazzled by the magnificence of her new home, heedless of court intrigue, and grateful to the minister, she openly espoused his cause. The Devout party were already prejudiced against the Austrian, and this open adherence to Choiseul roused in Madame de Marsan and the Duc de la Vauguyon an actual animosity ; they plotted to give her an untrustworthy confessor and a lady-in-waiting who was a creature of the Governess, and though the plots failed the animosity remained.

Madame Adélaïde took a different course. As the king was a widower, the duties of a queen fell on Marie-Antoinette, the most important of which was the superintendence of the gaming tables, or "holding court" from seven to nine each evening. Previous to the coming of the Austrian, Madame Adélaïde had performed this duty, and had held the position of first lady of the Court. Masterful and ambitious, treated with a certain respect by the king, accustomed to the confidence of her



brother the late Dauphin, jealous of her own and her sisters' prestige, it was no easy task to relinquish her place to a girl of fifteen, and she sought to maintain her old position and serve the ends of her party by governing the Dauphiness as she had hitherto governed the Dauphin.

She began by indulging every girlish whim. Routine and etiquette were wearisome to the Dauphiness, and Madame Adélaïde encouraged the dislike which Marie-Antoinette only too soon showed to the performance of public duties. The aunt was always ready to relieve the niece from holding court and to suggest that it was not the custom for the princesses of France to take trouble or show themselves gracious to the people. Marie-Antoinette wished to ride, her mother objected on the score of health, but Madame Adélaïde approved. Marie-Antoinette frittered the time devoted to study, and when Maria-Theresa remonstrated, Madame Adélaïde hinted that it was not necessary for a Princess of France to study hard. She was even teaching the Dauphiness to be shy and awkward with the strangers who visited Versailles, and to make a *coterie* of her own.

Against such training Maria-Theresa vehemently protested. In an indignant letter, written in September, 1771, she wrote: "Does my counsel, my affection deserve less than theirs? Think of the

part they have played in the world, and (though I do not like to say this) contrast it with the part that has been mine.”<sup>1</sup> And again: “This timidity and restraint towards the king and the courtiers . . . why is it? To please those who treat you like a baby, who secure for you pleasures, riding on horses or even on donkeys, games with children and with dogs!”<sup>2</sup> “It is for you, after the king, to give the tone to the Court, and not to be led like a child.” “You began so well, and your judgment when not misguided is always so true!” There was yet another indictment against Mesdames. “I hear,” wrote the Empress, “that you neglect to show attention to the great courtiers, that at table and at play you only talk to the young ladies, whispering in their ear and laughing with them.”<sup>3</sup>

This “neglect of the great” which Mesdames encouraged<sup>4</sup> and the Empress condemned proved a pitfall to the Dauphiness throughout her life, and it was made the more disastrous by her quick eye for the ridiculous and her readiness to make fun of the frequenters of the Court. In this, too, Mesdames encouraged her, and their rooms, in which Marie-Antoinette at first spent much of her time, was a centre of gossip, where no one was spared. “Mesdames” wrote Mercy to Maria-Theresa, “allow

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. i. p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. i. p. 217 seq. <sup>3</sup> *Idem*, vol. i. p. 160. <sup>4</sup> *Idem*, vol. i. p. 197.

themselves to make remarks which are, to say the least, imprudent; Madame the Dauphiness enjoys these and repeats them."<sup>1</sup> The aunts could hardly have done their niece a worse deed.

In later years, Marie-Antoinette continued as Queen what she had begun as Dauphiness, and the Court caught the habit, for, as has been well said, "it is the misfortune of princes that as soon as a fault of character is observed in them it is at once pandered to."<sup>2</sup>

Again, Madame Adélaïde wished Marie-Antoinette to treat Louis XV. as she and her sisters did—to make him no advance, to ask him no favour unless formally in writing, and not to acknowledge the Dubarry. Of this, too, Maria-Theresa distinctly disapproved. She considered disrespect to the favourite, disrespect to the king. "He is," she wrote, "your master as well as your grandfather and benefactor, and even as subject you owe him obedience."<sup>3</sup> There was perhaps no point on which the Empress was more emphatic. The king was hardly past the prime of life, and might reign many years, and the position which the Dauphiness held at Versailles must depend largely on her relation towards the king. "The effort of Mesdames,"

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol i. p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance entre le Comte de Mirabeau et le Comte de la March*, Introduction, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. i. p. 218.



wrote Mercy in 1771, "is to make the Dauphiness afraid of the king, and to estrange her from him."<sup>1</sup> It was only a part of the effort to make her a cypher both in life and in politics, and it met with strenuous opposition from the Empress, who, with her heroic past and present power, watched to see signs of a future for her daughter.

At length the counsel of the mother prevailed. Gradually Marie-Antoinette grew less submissive to the aunts, and more courageous towards the king. "It is clear you are of other blood than ours," Madame Adélaïde once said; and by-and-bye, though not until she had fostered in the Dauphiness those faults which afterwards brought such bitter retribution on the queen, Madame Adélaïde gave up the contest.<sup>2</sup>

As her influence declined, that of the Austrian ambassador and of the Abbé de Vermond—now appointed reader to the Dauphiness—increased. Maria-Theresa had appointed the Count Mercy counsellor-in-chief to the Dauphiness, and his visits to Marie-Antoinette were by no means confined to his official appearances at court. He went to Versailles as often as he thought his presence might be useful, frequently choosing the evening when play was going on, and groups of courtiers, dis-

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol i. p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> See *Idem*, vol. i. p. 456.



cussing the events of the hour, hung about the table of the Dauphiness. Mercy was a favourite at the palace, and gossip was freely told him. He listened, reflected, and every fortnight sent the Empress a detailed account of all that could in any way affect the conduct of the Dauphiness or the interests of Austria at Versailles.

But if the ambassador was popular in the French Court, the reader was not. While at Vienna, the Abbé de Vermond had seen much of the Empress, and she had sent him back more Austrian than French. For this reason—and because he had been chosen by Choiseul—the Duc de la Vauguyon, Madame de Marsan, and the princesses were his enemies.<sup>1</sup> The Dauphin, whether from the influence of his ex-governor or from his own careless awkwardness, did not once speak to him in the first three and a half years of his residence at Versailles.<sup>2</sup>

Vermond kept strictly aloof from every party ; he never visited at the houses of the king's ministers ; and when not with his royal mistress, he spent his time in his own rooms in the Grand Commun, " a kind of life," says Mercy, " very little suited to that of the intriguers at this Court, who naturally regard the Abbé as an obstacle to their views on

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. i. p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. ii. p. 39.

the Dauphiness.”<sup>1</sup> Blamed for encouraging the Dauphiness in her impatience of etiquette, and disliked for arrogating to himself the office of counsellor, he was called her evil star.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in so far as he knew how, the Abbé de Vermond was a faithful servant. “Enlightened, honourable, holding himself independent of all party, he lives only for the queen,”<sup>3</sup> wrote Mercy after ten years’ experience of the reader’s services. It was this very fact that made the Abbé a narrow-minded counsellor. With him personal indebtedness was a reason for acts of political significance, and the interests of France were forgotten in the pleasure of forwarding any who had helped him in his own advance.

Unfortunately, Marie-Antoinette had no better advisers than those provided by her mother. “With the exception of M. the Dauphin,” wrote Mercy in 1772, “the Abbé de Vermond and I are the only persons whom Her Royal Highness honours with her real confidence.”<sup>3</sup> The confidence enjoyed by the husband was not great. There had been no touch of poetry or affection in the feelings of the Archduchess towards her future husband; the romance, the glamour of her marriage, lay in the position it brought her. To be Dauphiness and then Queen

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. p. 402.

of France was her future ; to be the wife of Louis-Auguste was, as it were, an accident.

Yet the Dauphin was not indifferent to his wife. He told Madame Adélaïde that he considered her very amiable, and even acknowledged her grace and charm to a lady-in-waiting ; Mercy treasured these remarks, and, writing to Maria-Theresa, repeated them. There was admiration, but no spark of passion. Now and again, at intervals of weeks, Mercy records a conversation held between Marie-Antoinette and her husband. Madame the Dauphiness had told the Dauphin they must be more with each other, and that they " must discuss things together without reserve " ;<sup>1</sup> whereupon they fell to talking of Madame Dubarry, which, if confidential, was hardly lover-like.

" When my husband is busy," the Dauphiness wrote to her mother, " I go to my aunts." <sup>2</sup> Louis in his own way was often busy. He never forsook the pursuits he had followed as a boy, and spent many an hour in the making of maps, in designing door locks and working brass.<sup>3</sup> He had his own

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. i. p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. i. p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> In the palace of Compiègne, in the floor of the room shown as the *salle de travail* of Louis XVI., is a geometrical figure formed of flat-headed brass nails. It indicates the four quarters, N., E., S., and W., and is very carefully executed. It was made by Louis when king. At Fontainebleau also, in one of the apartments shown as belonging to Napoleon, and once occupied by Louis XVI., are beautifully worked handles to the French windows, said to have been made by the king.



forge and carpentering shop, but above all these things he loved the chase ! To this the Dauphin devoted himself with an ardour that outdid that of his grandfather. He studied the huge charts of the forests that lay in the king's apartments in the palace, and knew each forest, its *allées*, and its game as if he were himself their keeper.

From the first Marie-Antoinette assumed the responsibilities of a wife, and was not afraid to take her husband to task on occasion. She objected to his excessive love of hunting—she disliked his late returns, too tired and too sleepy to be attentive to her or civil to her ladies, too late to be in time for the evening entertainments he was expected to attend. But if boorish the Dauphin was good-natured. He liked to watch her girlish impetuosity and young wifely ways, and never seriously resented her fault-finding ; indeed, for the time he generally improved. She had much to contend against. It almost seemed as if there were no princeliness at all in this Louis of hers. She found him in his rooms dirty and tired out, because he had been at work with the masons who were ever present at Versailles ; she saw him turn his back upon a company that did not please him, and drum with his fingers on the window-panes. He seldom spoke to anyone when not in his own apartments, nor was it expected of him to add to the ease or pleasantness



of a court reception; "the Dauphin," it was said, "noticed no one."<sup>1</sup>

And yet, brusque and dull as he was, Louis-Auguste was a good man, and Marie-Antoinette came to know it, and to contrast his conduct with that of his brothers.

Louis-Stanislas, Comte de Provence, was ambitious and unscrupulous. "By any means in his power," wrote Mercy, "he strives to make himself the centre of the dominant party at Court."<sup>2</sup> He was the ablest of the three brothers, had a retentive memory and a love of politics. He liked a following, whereas his brother Charles liked companionship. With all the faults, the extravagance, recklessness, and dissipation of the Comte d'Artois, there was about him a certain loveliness. No one could be more gay, gracious, or easy, more haughty, indifferent, or frivolous than he, but he did not disguise his moods, and never pretended to be better than he was.

Both brothers paid Marie-Antoinette a good deal of attention, but while the attention of the Comte de Provence had in it a selfish purpose for his own ends<sup>3</sup> that of the Comte d'Artois was for herself. The Comte d'Artois she liked, the Comte de

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. i. p. 339.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. i. p. 252.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. *Idem.*, vol. i. pp. 293 and 365.

Provence she got on with, but never thoroughly trusted.

On the 14th of May, 1771, the Comte de Provence married Marie-Joséphine-Louise of Savoy, and on the 16th of November, 1773, the Comte d'Artois married Marie-Thérèse, her younger sister. Neither of these ladies had beauty or charm. The king thought Madame de Provence very ugly, and Marie-Antoinette considered her stupid. Her husband seemed to think her both, and she lived, we are told, very much in her own rooms. As to poor Madame d'Artois, she was in every respect a melancholy contrast to her husband. Little, plain, awkward, timid, she seemed indifferent to everything and everyone, and was a sad disappointment at Court.

There had been some hope among the upholders of traditional policy that these marriages would counteract the Austrian influence at Court.<sup>1</sup> But the ladies of Savoy had none of the brilliancy and charm of the daughter of Maria-Theresa,<sup>2</sup> and from the time of their marriages the Dauphiness began to take a more independent position at Versailles. She was more with her husband, less with her aunts, and took the lead among the brothers and sisters of the royal household.

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. i. p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. i. p. 173 and vol. ii. p. 94.

Meantime the alliance with Austria had done little for France, and one does not wonder that the Austrian influence brought to bear on the gracious, sprightly, heedless little Dauphiness was resented at Versailles.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE QUARREL WITH THE PARLEMENT.



MAUPROU.

FOR some time before the marriage of the Dauphin the Parlement of Paris had been showing itself increasingly regardless of the wishes of Versailles. It had estranged itself from the Devout party there by deciding against the Jesuits; and it had raised the enmity

of the older nobility by daring to condemn the Duc d'Aiguillon for his conduct when Governor of Brittany. By these acts it had roused the jealousy of the Chancellor of France, the Comte de Maupéou, who preferred a Parlement that followed the will of king and courtiers to one which followed the judgment of its own councillors. The Comte de Maupéou, the Duc d'Aiguillon, and their set wished to get rid of this Parlement, but the Duc de



Choiseul favoured it, and he was known to stand high in the esteem of Louis XV. Therefore Choiseul must also be got rid of, and how to do so was the question.

Madame Dubarry, who hated Choiseul, and was in league against him with d'Aiguillon, Maupeou, la Vrillière, and the Abbé Terray would willingly tease the king with complaints of the Minister of War and of his conduct toward her.<sup>1</sup> In time this might effect their purpose, for Louis hated to be troubled and would sacrifice any minister who interfered with his personal ease. Some public cause of offence must however be assigned, and therefore, whether with or without reason is hard to say, Choiseul was accused of trying to incite a war between England and the Bourbon powers, *for the purpose of making himself indispensable to the king*. This happened in the winter of 1770.

Meantime the Chancellor busied himself in driving things to an extremity between the Parlement and the Crown. On the 27th November, 1770, an edict was sent to the Palais de Justice to be registered, which had for its aim a restriction of the powers of the parlements. In this edict the Crown complained that the parlements, not only of Paris, but also of the provinces, had put forth pretensions unheard of until now. They had called themselves

<sup>1</sup> Flammermont, *Le chancelier Maupeou et les parlements*, p. 180.

"representatives of the nation, the proper interpreters of the will of the king, the guardians of the administration,"<sup>1</sup> and had claimed a right to see that the crown debts were paid. To these pretensions the king replied, that "we hold our crown from God alone, the right of making laws belongs to us alone, we permit our courts to examine these laws, and if they find in them anything inconvenient, we allow them to make respectful remonstrance, but this custom must not become 'a right to resist,' and if after considering their remonstrance we persevere in our purpose, the laws must be registered and carried out without contradiction."<sup>2</sup>

In all this the king was within the prerogatives long considered his, while the Chancellor had some ground for the complaints he had brought against the Parlement of Paris. It had used its right of remonstrance too frequently, and had too often interrupted public business. Clients complained, and great inconvenience was caused, but such things the Parlement considered as of secondary importance. In this assertion of royal power it saw an attempt at despotism, which it determined to resist. It had with it the sympathy of Paris, and of the Choiseul party at Court, and refused to register the edict which would cripple its powers.

<sup>1</sup> Flammermont, *Le chancelier Maupeou et les parlements*, pp. 117, 118.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*.

As a consequence the king summoned his Parlement of Paris to Versailles. Now this was a fresh ground of complaint, for it had been the general though not invariable custom of the kings to go to the Parlement instead of ordering the Parlement to go to them, but Louis XV. was lazy, and, after all, the quarrel was less with him than with his Chancellor, the well-hated Maupeou.

On December the 7th, therefore, Parlement met in the palace of Versailles, in a hall specially prepared for a *Lit de Justice*. There were present the princes of the blood, the peers of the realm, the ministers, councillors and Masters of Requests, and also three governors and eight lieutenants of provinces, for the proposed edicts affected the provincial parlements as well as that of Paris.<sup>1</sup>

Many an anxious eye was cast on the Chancellor, the Duc d'Aiguillon, and the Duc de la Vrillière, known enemies of the Parlement, while the absence of the Duc de Choiseul was regarded as ominous.

Presently the king rose and said that the Chancellor would announce the object of the meeting, whereupon Maupeou left his place, and after the usual ceremonies, repeated what had already been written about the pretensions of the Parlement and the powers of the crown. As he closed his speech all the

<sup>1</sup> Flammermont, *Le chancelier Maupeou et les parlements*, p. 139 seq.



magistrates knelt; the king told them to rise, and standing with hats off they listened while their First President declared that notwithstanding their "loyalty to the king, nay, because of that loyalty, they must persist in refusing to register edicts which were against the fundamental law of France. They were filled," he continued, "with grief and alarm, but they could not help themselves."<sup>1</sup> The protest was in vain. Reasons were given why the edicts must be registered, and the mockery of asking each one present his opinion having been punctiliously performed, the king commanded Maupeou to read the order for the registering of the edict.

That same evening the magistrates returned to Paris and held a long sitting in the Palais de Justice. They met again on the 10th of December, and decided to send their First President to the king, praying him to revoke the registration of the edict, or, if he would not, to submit themselves *tête et état*—life and goods—to his will. Meantime they agreed to remain "*Chambres assemblées*," that is, not to separate into the smaller courts, until the king should reply.<sup>2</sup> By this last resolve they showed themselves as stubborn in deed as they were submissive in word.

<sup>1</sup> Flammermont, *Le chancelier Maupeou et les parlements*, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p. 145 *seq.*



De par le Roy

47

Notre amice (seul) nous envoie par un  
 Comte d'Armenonville, Chevalier de l'Ordre  
 Constitutionnel au même titre, pour l'enregistrement  
 d'un édit nous mandons de faire tous les  
 registres nécessaires et que son dit Comte de  
 l'Ordre, chargé d'effectuer l'acte en  
 notre place, donne à l'Assemblée quatorze  
 jours de délai pour l'accomplir  
 Louis



*Edict de Louis XV.*

LETTRÉ DE CACHET OF LOUIS XV. SENDING AN EDICT FOR  
 REGISTRATION TO THE PARLEMENT OF PARIS.

From 'Collection Joli de Fleuri' in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



The king had gone to La Muette in the Bois de Boulogne for a few days, and was playing at cards when the president arrived. He refused to be interrupted, but took a card and wrote on it, "Go to Versailles at seven o'clock on Wednesday evening, when I return there. I command my Parlement to resume its ordinary work." But the magistrates did not resume their work, and on Tuesday drew up a second address, in which they this time warned the king that the throne itself might suffer from his act. "You have attacked the fundamental laws of France . . . and these laws, Sire, include among them the immutability of the monarchical government,"<sup>1</sup> and with these words the president once more sought the king.

But now the quarrel began in earnest. The king would not receive the president because the Parlement had not "resumed its functions," and the Parlement would not resume its functions until the king received its president,—truly king and Parlement were at variance.

If the Chancellor had wished to drive matters to an extremity between the king and magistrates, he had done so, and now came his opportunity. He went to Louis, and told him that the moment had come when he must decide between himself and Choiseul. If Choiseul, defender of the Parlement,

<sup>1</sup> Flammermont, *Le chancelier Maupeou et les parlements*, p. 147 seq.

remained a minister, he, Maupeou, would resign. Louis decided for Maupeou.

Le roi, dans son lit endormi  
S'éveilla et dit : Mon cher ami  
Je veux enfin vivre à mon aise ;  
Je suis vieux, le sceptre me pèse,  
Prends-le Maupeou ; Maupeou le prit  
Et le prince se rendormit,<sup>1</sup>

sang the Paris rhymsters, and no one contradicted them.

On Thursday, the 24th December, the king sent for the Duc de la Vrillière, and gave him a letter to deliver to Choiseul. Choiseul opened the letter, and read :

"I command my cousin the Duc de Choiseul to place his resignation as Secretary of State and Superintendent of the Posts in the hands of the Duc de la Vrillière, and to retire to Chanteloup until further orders.

" LOUIS ———.

"Versailles, December 24, 1770."

Choiseul was in residence at Versailles, but his family were in Paris at his town house in the Rue de Richelieu. He left Versailles at once, and, driving quickly, reached Paris just as his family were sitting down to dinner. His wife glanced at her husband as he entered the room. She saw something had happened. "You look like an exiled man," she said ; "but sit down, our dinner will not be less

<sup>1</sup> Flammermont, *Le chancelier Maupeou et les parlements*, p. 217.



good if you are";<sup>1</sup> and without more ado they quietly continued the meal.

If the duke and duchess were proudly quiet, the Parisians were not. Next day Choiseul, with his wife and devoted sister, the Duchesse de Gramont, drove out of the capital on their way to Chanteloup, his seat in Touraine. From the Rue de Richelieu to the gate by which the carriages left Paris, the streets were lined by an indignant populace, who openly and loudly expressed their feelings.<sup>2</sup>

Choiseul was dismissed, but Parlement did not yield. The Christmas vacation passed, and the business of the courts was not resumed, nor was the edict promulgated. Curt letters had been sent to the Palais de Justice from Versailles, and respectful messages had been returned, and now on January 18th, 1771, Louis wrote, that "before punishing his Parlement for its disobedience he gave it one more chance of returning to its duties, although it must understand that there was no hope of his revoking the edict or leaving it ineffectual." On the same day the Parlement replied that it "decided to await with all respect and submission the events with which it was threatened."<sup>3</sup>

The next day, a Saturday, passed quietly, but on

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. i. p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> Flammermont, *Le chancelier Maupeou et les parlements*, p. 186.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 206.

Sunday morning the storm broke. Early on that morning, between one and four o'clock, when the gentlemen of the Parlement were secure in their homes, there passed along the streets of Paris, soldiers of the Royal Musketeers. They carried with them *lettres de cachet*,<sup>1</sup> which they were charged to deliver into the hands of each councillor, no one being present but the councillor and the musketeer, nor was the recipient to be allowed a friend to consult with or time to consider his reply. At once he must declare by a written "Yes" or "No" whether he intended to obey or disobey the king's commands. The instinct of obedience was strong. In the trouble of the moment, fifty promised to obey—twelve of whom immediately retracted—thirty-five gave no answer, but seventy boldly wrote "No."

As soon as it was light the councillors hurried to the house of M. d'Aligre, their First President, and asked him to assemble the *Chambres* at once—each man had acted for himself in the night, and they wished to act together now. At four o'clock on the Sunday afternoon, therefore, the councillors met in the Salle de la Grand'chambre, the large hall off the Salle des Pas Perdus in which the *Chambres assemblées* always held their deliberations.

<sup>1</sup> A *lettre de cachet* is simply a sealed order from the king : an order of banishment was sent by *lettres de cachet*, but the term is not confined to such orders.

The gilding on the rosettes of the dark oak ceiling, a candle of yellow wax burning on the desk before the dean, another supported by a gilt bracket set in a wooden stand by the bar, were the only light spots in the darkness of the winter afternoon.<sup>1</sup>

The First President was not there, for strict orders had been sent forbidding him or any of the presidents to go to the Palais de Justice. In his place sat Monsieur de Fermé, an old man of eighty-two years of age, who, having received and survived fourteen *lettres de cachet*, was not afraid to preside over a deliberation held against the express orders of the Chancellor.

The sitting lasted until between nine and ten in the evening, and at length the Parlement concluded that, having already decided to await the events with which it was threatened, no member, without breaking his oath of office, could depart from that resolution.

Thereupon the doors of the Grand'chambre were thrown open, and Monsieur de Fermé, leaning on the arm of a clerk of the Parlement, came out. In his hand, tremulous with age, he held the declaration of their decision. After him the councillors walked quietly, two by two, lighted by torches carried by their servants. The people who had lingered in the Salle des Pas Perdus and in the galleries of the

<sup>1</sup> See Babeau, *Paris en 1789*, for description of Palais de Justice.



Palais were moved to tears as they saw the men most respected in their city thus leave the hall of justice. They knew what would follow.

That night again the musketeers were busy. The house of each councillor who had answered "No," or who had not replied at all, was visited, first by an officer of the king's household bringing an order from the king's council which deprived the member of his office, and immediately afterwards by the musketeers bearing again a hated *lettre de cachet* which commanded departure from Paris that same day, without seeing any friend. The *lettres de cachet* appointed the place of exile for each member, and many of these were chosen because of their remoteness.

These acts were entirely arbitrary, for the magistrates of the French parlements held their office by right of inheritance, of purchase, or of appointment ratified by Parlement itself, but they had resolved "to await with submission" the king's will, and there was no redress.

The effect of the night's work was immediate. The thirty-eight who had written "Yes," and had not yet retracted, at once held a meeting, identifying themselves with their fellow-councillors, and in consequence followed them next day into exile.<sup>1</sup>

The edict which the Parlement had so resolutely

<sup>1</sup> Flammermont, *Le chancelier Maupeou et les parlements*, p. 211 seq.



withstood was directed against their right of remonstrance, or rather against the measures employed by the councillors to enforce that right. It forbade them "to suspend service" or to delay registration after receiving the king's answer to a remonstrance and thus reduced their remonstrance to a mere form. In this contest Maupeou had triumphed, and he was now to strike the Parlement a more deadly blow. Paris could not do without its Law Courts. Their business had been too long suspended, and the places of the exiled magistrates must be filled. On the 23rd of January the king commanded members of the Council of State to fulfil the functions of the Parlement, and on the 24th Maupeou went to instal them in the Palais de Justice. There was intense excitement in the capital, and it was an unpleasant occasion for the Chancellor. He drove to the Palais in public procession, escorted by the city guard and followed by a hundred carriages, in which sat the Councillors of State and Masters of Requests. Guards had been placed at the gates of the Palais to keep out the crowd, but the people filled the great outer court and had penetrated into the Grand'chambre. "Keep close to me," Maupeou whispered to his councillors, as he saw the angry faces round him, and hurrying the business as much as possible, he broke up the meeting as quickly as he could.

But the work done in that hurried meeting was not soon forgiven. In the place of the old councillors holding office in their own right, Maupeou had installed men who held office at the king's pleasure, and were "accustomed to judge matters in accordance with the wishes of Versailles."<sup>1</sup> He had struck at the great principle of the immovability of the judges of the supreme courts of legislature. At once the provincial parlements and courts of justice other than those of the parlements remonstrated, and already was heard that demand for the assembling of the States General, which was to grow ever more and more insistent.

The resentment against the Chancellor was strong in all classes of the citizens. It was as strong among the princes of the blood as among the valets of the townsfolk. While therefore the new magistrates had to sneak to their business by side streets, while their servants threw up their situations rather than be mocked at by others of their class, while ladies were eagerly discussing the state of things, and socially banning every man connected with the new Parlement,<sup>2</sup> the princes of the blood were meeting at the Palais Royal, and consulting with its master, the Duc d'Orléans.

<sup>1</sup> Droz, *Règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. Intro. p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> *Protestations et Arrêts des Dames. Avis aux Dames.* Contemporary Pamphlets.

Meantime the task of the new magistrates was not easy. Advocates shut their office doors and refused to plead, and litigants withdrew their cases. "Maupeou would be saved," was the saying in the capital, "if he could silence the women and make the advocates speak."<sup>1</sup> The deadlock was as intolerable now as it had been in January, and the Chancellor resolved to give his interim Parlement the status of one regularly constituted by the king. On the 13th of April, 1771, at a *Lit de Justice*, held at Versailles, Louis suppressed the old Parlement and constituted that of Maupeou its lawful successor.<sup>2</sup>

The kings had often exiled Parlement as a whole, and for a time, to some town outside of Paris ; but this was a complete break-up of the oldest and most prized institution in France. "When the people," says de Tocqueville, "saw the Parlement, almost as old as royalty itself, fall, they understood that times were coming in which any change was possible."<sup>3</sup>

To such things Louis XV. was indifferent, but there was another feature in the quarrel which affected him more intimately. On this matter of the Parlement the princes and the king were in

<sup>1</sup> Droz, *Règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. Intro. p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Gazette de France*, 19th April, 1771.

<sup>3</sup> Tocqueville, *Ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 301.



opposition, and the people were with the princes. Because the Duc d'Orléans opposed the king, they went so far as to write on the walls of the Palais Royal, "Show yourself, great prince, and we shall put the crown on *your* head."<sup>1</sup> And when in April the king forbade the princes to approach the court, to appear before his person, or to see any member of the royal family, because of their refusal to be present at the *Lit de Justice*, the people looked on them as heroes, and upon the house of Orleans as a centre of opposition to the crown. Meantime the government went from bad to worse. The taxes were twice as heavy as when the king began to reign, and Terray was recklessly increasing them. Suicide became alarmingly common, and smuggling, despite severe punishment, was resorted to because honest labour only brought heavier taxation, and the country was weary of a king it once had called the Well-Beloved.

<sup>1</sup> Flammermont, *Le chancelier Maupeou et les parlements*, p. 251 *seq.*



## CHAPTER X.

### CHANGE OF SOVEREIGNS.



MADAME DUBARRY.

IN the early days of May, 1774, there was alarm in the palace at Versailles. The king had taken smallpox and it was not likely he would recover, but as a true son of the church, he would certainly desire to die in peace with her. This then was the

source of alarm; for if the king confessed and yielded his conscience to the clergy the day of Madame Dubarry and with her of the Duc d'Aiguillon was at an end. So the duke filled the palace with his people, controlled the *entrées* to the king's chamber, and persuaded Madame Adélaïde that to see a priest would cost the king his life. For Madame Adélaïde—ready in sickness to risk her life, if unable in

prosperity to sacrifice her will—was nursing her father, and Mesdames Victoire and Sophie were there too. But as each day passed the king grew worse, and on the fourth of May he himself asked his physician, La Martinière, what was the nature of his disease.<sup>1</sup> “If it is small-pox,” said Louis, “at my age I cannot recover.” At four o’clock that afternoon Madame Dubarry had left the palace, and Paris and Versailles knew that their king was dying.

There were prayers for him both in the city and in the court. The church of Sainte Geneviève, patron saint of Paris, was crowded by the curious and the devout. They crossed the bridges and climbed the narrow steep streets of the “mountains of Sainte Geneviève,” to kiss the shrine of the saint and to pray for the king. The whole populace of Paris, we are told, was there, for the sacred shrine was only uncovered when kings lay dying, and it served as a bulletin to the city as well as a means of grace to the devout. As the king grew worse the covering was gradually withdrawn.<sup>2</sup>

In the royal chapel at Versailles the priests prayed for forty hours without intermission, and prayed for the most part alone. A member of the royal family, courtiers, or servants of the palace

<sup>1</sup> Falloux, *Vie de Louis XVI.*, p. 42. Cp. also Mercy, *Correspondance Secrète*, vol. ii. p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, vol. ii. pp. 246, 258.

might pass in, but they did not linger long. The centre of interest was not the chapel but the *Œil-de-Bœuf*. No one save his daughters, the banished favourite, and a few old courtiers cared much what happened to the king here or hereafter, and so men hurried from the chapel to the *Œil-de-Bœuf*, and there watched the door of the king's apartments, noted who entered and who left, and conjectured what would happen to this man and to that.

Meantime in her own apartments Marie-Antoinette and the Dauphin remained in strict retirement, refusing to receive any visitors. On the first news of the king's serious illness the Dauphiness had asked to be allowed to share in her aunts' watch, but this was considered too great a danger. How she spent the quiet days we cannot say, there is no letter to her mother written then, but her behaviour is highly praised by the Comte de Mercy, and the good impression was strengthened by gifts sent by her and by the Dauphin to the poor of Paris.

By Tuesday the 10th May, the prayers, the watching, and the speculating were over. About three o'clock in the afternoon the door of the king's chamber opened and the decisive words were uttered. The king was dead, had died while M. de la Roche-Aymon was repeating the prayer for the dying. Instantly the aspect of the *Œil-de-Bœuf* changed. The countenances of those thronging the hall



lightened. They turned from the king's chamber and hurried into the gallery leading to the apartments of Marie-Antoinette. To all parts of the palace the news spread, and from all parts with a noise, "absolutely like thunder," the courtiers hastened to congratulate their new sovereign. The first to enter and to call the Dauphin and Dauphiness "King and Queen" was Madame de Noailles. She had been the first to welcome Marie-Antoinette on French soil. A sense of youth, and of unpreparedness overcame the young couple, and falling on their knees they cried, "Oh my God, we are too young to reign, guard us, protect us."<sup>1</sup> It was the one touch of noble feeling in the worldly scene, and alas! it was but for a moment. The royal carriages waiting to take the Court from Versailles to Choisy were in readiness. The late king's grandsons and their wives drove together. They started in tears, but before they had driven half-way tears and solemn feelings had given place to laughter, for had not the Countess of d'Artois, more Italian than French, mispronounced a word!<sup>2</sup> Mesdames following alone in their own carriage grieved longer.

That evening the shrine of Sainte Geneviève was wholly bare, and everywhere, it is said, men's faces brightened. The people had prayed for their king, but it was for his salvation in another world, not for

<sup>1</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 78.      <sup>2</sup> *Id.*, vol. i. p. 80.



his recovery in this. Nor did they hesitate to say so. Paris was growing bold, and openly in the streets the Parisians had expressed the hope that the king would die. "Your saint has not proved efficacious," said some young free-thinkers to the Abbé of Sainte Geneviève. "Nay," was the reply, "of what do you complain, is not the king dead?"<sup>1</sup> At Versailles a courtier in whom lurked some loyal feeling, visited the deserted palace, and hoped to find some token of respect. He looked in vain; the remains of his sovereign were left in charge of one or two under-servants, the corridors were empty, but in the gardens the people walked as usual, and both there and in the town the king's death was regarded with profound indifference.

Two days later at seven in the evening the remains of Louis XV. were taken to St. Denis to await the state funeral. An escort of twenty pages and of fifty grooms accompanied the coffin. They carried torches to light the way, but they wore no mourning. With them went two carriages. A captain of the king's guards and a gentleman of the bed-chamber were in one, the Grand-Almoner and the parish priest of Versailles were in the other. They went at a quick trot, and as they passed, the people mocked.<sup>2</sup>

There was no alienation from royalty in the sigh

<sup>1</sup> Bachaumont, *Mémoires*, vol. vii. p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> *Gustave III. et la Cour de France*, vol. i. p. 271.

of relief which went up from France at the news that her king was dead. Neither then nor for many years did men dream of any government save that of a monarchy. Tired of Louis XV., the nation turned with hope to his successor. They knew the Dauphin was pure in morals and solicitous for the welfare of his people, and knowing thus much they invested him with every virtue and every gift. Lives of Louis XVI., fulsome in their flattery, filled the Paris book-stalls, while under a statue to Henri IV.—perhaps the most popular king France had ever known—some one wrote “Resurrexit.”

But from Austria came anxious words of warning. “You are both very young, and the responsibility is great. I am anxious, truly anxious. Hasten nothing, see things with your own eyes; change nothing,”<sup>1</sup> wrote Maria-Theresa. It was a warning at variance with the spirit of the young king and queen. The Empress was concerned for the dignity and security of the French throne; the king of France was desirous for the good of his people; the queen, for a freer and more pleasant life, and for these things change was a necessity. The dignity and security of the throne seemed inevitable as the shining of the sun, and to see things “with their own eyes” an effort which the king was unable, and the queen unwilling to make.

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 150.

## CHAPTER XI.

### CHANGE OF MINISTERS.



MAUREPAS.

“CHANGE nothing,” Maria-Theresa had written to her daughter. But this was not the temper of France any more than of her rulers. With a change of king, France wished for a change of ministers, a change of parties, and a change of Parlement. And

France, or rather Paris, was impatient.

There were, as has been already said,<sup>1</sup> five departments in the French government, viz., War, Foreign Affairs, the King’s Household, the Marine, and Finance, and in addition to these was the office of the Chancellor, which raised the number to six. When Louis XV. died, five of these departments

<sup>1</sup> See page 35.



were under the control of men who were hated or despised, or else both hated and despised, and the sixth—the Marine—was held by a minister too insignificant to be considered at all. The Duc d'Aiguillon, distrusted for his opposition to Parlement, and despised because of his support of the Dubarry, held office both as Minister of War and Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Duc de la Vrillière, of whom Mercy writes that he was universally held in contempt,<sup>1</sup> was Minister of the King's Household, and with it of much of the internal business of France. Maupeou, detested by the people, but by no means to be despised, was Chancellor, and therefore at the head of all matters which concerned law, while the Abbé Terray, for whom neither history nor contemporary opinion has one good word, was Controller of Finance. "In a word," wrote a thoughtful Frenchwoman to Gustave III., king of Sweden, "France is ruined if the present administration continues."<sup>2</sup>

According to the old French regime, a Prime Minister was not essential, for the king himself was active head of the government, each minister going directly to him and submitting to him all proposals, for approval or disapproval. But there were occa-

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 323.

<sup>2</sup> *Gustave III. et la Cour de France*, vol. i. p. 282. *Lettre de Mme. de Boufflers*, July 20, 1774.



sions when such a minister was deemed advisable, and this was one. Louis XVI. was too young and inexperienced to take on himself the responsibility of government without an able adviser. Clearly, there was no such adviser among his present ministers, and some one outside of these must be chosen.

It is difficult to over-estimate the importance of the choice of the new minister. The king recognised his youth and inexperience, but he did not recognise that behind these lay a feebleness of will veiled from his own eyes by the obstinacy peculiar to weakness and by the very sincerity of his good intentions. "Seated on the throne on which it has pleased God to place us, we trust that His goodness will sustain our youth and guide us in the ways which will make our people happy. This is our first desire,"<sup>1</sup> wrote Louis XVI. in the preamble to his earliest edict, and from this desire he never swerved. But desire is not resolution, and a firm will and clear insight were above all things necessary in his adviser.

Marie-Antoinette would have had Choiseul, and the king knew it, and did not consult her, for Louis trusted in his father's judgment and followed his policy. His own choice turned towards M. de Machault who had, says Droz,<sup>2</sup> been the one enlightened Minister of Finance among the fourteen

<sup>1</sup> Falloux, *Vie de Louis XVI.*, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Droz, *Règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 126.

who held that office under Louis XV. "Knowing that the happiness of our people depends principally on a wise administration of the finances, we shall turn our attention to them above all else,"<sup>1</sup> the first edict had gone on to say, and in this choice of an adviser Louis bade fair to fulfil his promise. But just at this crisis, because of the admiration excited by her devotion during her father's illness, Madame Adélaïde's influence was strong. "Those three old maids will be seen meddling in everything, and they have become so interesting it will be thought that the world should be turned upside down for them," wrote a sharp Parisian critic, always jealous of Versailles. The critic had too much reason. Madame Adélaïde did meddle. By her advice the Comte de Maurepas was chosen as the king's adviser,<sup>2</sup> and Louis XVI. made the first great mistake of his reign.

The Comte de Maurepas was a man of sixty-three when Louis recalled him to Versailles. He had been dismissed from office and exiled from court during the reign of Louis XV., because of a witticism made at the expense of Madame de Pompadour, but he was well known in society as a man of wit, of excellent memory, and of the suavest manners. "He is," wrote Horace Walpole in October, 1774, "by far

<sup>1</sup> Falloux, *Vie de Louis XVI.*, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 146, note.

the ablest and most agreeable man in Paris.”<sup>1</sup> The estimate was over generous. Agreeable, witty, quick at repartee, Maurepas could sacrifice a principle to a bon-mot; pleasure-loving and indolent, he could see Paris rise in riot and yet go quietly to the Opera; if fortunate in his choice of a minister, he was careless to retain him; selfish and ambitious, his aim was to remain in office with the fewest annoyances possible. To secure this he followed a consistent policy. He always adopted the popular course, and he made himself the intermediary between the ministers and the king.

To this interference Maurepas' post gave him no legal claim. Each minister, as alone responsible for his own department, had the right of direct access to the king; but so well did Maurepas know how to use the advantages of his position that only the strongest ministers dared to combat his action; even Necker wrote, “I never worked alone with the king.”<sup>2</sup> All business was taken first to Maurepas, who, having seen the proposals ministers wished to make before they were submitted to the king, was in a position to advise the king to reject or accept as he, Maurepas, thought most convenient. He took care to be present at all interviews between the sovereign and the ministers, so as to be himself

<sup>1</sup> Walpole, *Letter to Hon. H. S. Conway*, October 16th, 1774.

<sup>2</sup> Necker, *Administration des Finances*, Introduction, p. 137.



the king's latest adviser—a personage of much influence with Louis XVI.! If a minister were obstinate or unpopular, he could be dismissed. Maurepas alone must remain; and until 1781 he did remain, exercising an influence almost uniformly hurtful to France.

The appointment of a Prime Minister, whose whole duty was to advise the king, was dreaded by Mercy. "It has always been the *rôle* of a first minister in France to lessen the influence of the queen," wrote the ambassador, who saw his hope for Marie-Antoinette fading before him, and who was even a little indignant with his august mistress; for, "if the queen liked," he continued, "she could very easily prevent the appointment."<sup>1</sup>

But Marie-Antoinette was busied with other things, and though quick to resent any disregard of her wishes in any given case, was not eager for political power, and it did not trouble her much that the new minister speedily verified the ambassador's fears. Outwardly suave and polite, he was yet steady in his opposition to the queen, and as her influence grew with her husband, Maurepas set himself to counteract that influence.<sup>2</sup>

There was jealousy of Austrian politics in Maurepas' opposition, jealousy of any influence paramount

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. ii. p. 239 *seq.*



to his own, and there was personal dislike as well. On the 2nd of June, 1774, d'Aiguillon, who, since the fall of Choiseul, held the double office of Minister of War and of Foreign Affairs, was dismissed, and the queen, who thoroughly disliked d'Aiguillon, boasted that the dismissal was her doing. "The departure of the Duke is entirely my doing," wrote Marie-Antoinette to the Comte de Rosenberg, and what she wrote in private she said in public. Now the Duc d'Aiguillon was a nephew of Madame de Maurepas, and the boast added to the disfavour in which Maurepas and his set already regarded the queen, while it made of d'Aiguillon an open enemy. He had long been a secret one, as the queen knew. "Things had come to a pass," she continued in the letter already quoted; "the wretched man had instituted a regular system of spying and spread all kinds of evil reports."<sup>1</sup> (about herself). From the time of his fall date the pamphlets which began to be circulated against the queen, and which had their origin, not in popular prejudice, but in private hatred and intrigue.

With the dismissal of the Duke a better element was introduced into French politics. The Maréchal de Muy became Minister of War, and the Comte de Vergennes, Minister of Foreign Affairs. Both these men were ministers first and courtiers second, and

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 362 *seq.*

Vergennes was as able as he was honest. During the thirteen years of his ministry he preserved the prestige of France among foreign nations, but he had little sympathy with political reform, and he held to the traditional policy regarding Austria.

The public breathed relief when d'Aiguillon went, but only for a moment, for while Terray and Maupeou remained in power, Paris would not rest. More than two months had passed since Louis XV. died, and these men were still in office. There were fewer and less hearty shouts when the king and queen appeared, and the "Resurrexit" which had been written on the statue of Henri IV. early in May had now been seen on that of Louis XV.<sup>1</sup> The people grumbled that reforms were slow and the old Parlement still in exile. They had not long to wait. On August 24th, Maupeou and Terray were dismissed, and Paris was quick to show its joy and take what revenge it could. The students made an effigy of Maupeou, carried it to the place of public execution—the great Place de Grève in front of the Hôtel de Ville—and there had it torn to pieces, slowly and with much urging, by four asses. The effigy of Terray was solemnly hanged, and the night was passed in letting off squibs.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Gustave III. et la Cour de France*, vol. i. p. 281.

<sup>2</sup> See Droz, *Règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 139, and Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 229, note.

Maupeou was replaced by M. de Miromesnil, a man of no particular account, but whom Maurepas had found a pleasant guest when he himself was in exile. With the disgrace of Terray, however, there followed an appointment full of significance to France. On the 14th of July—a memorable date in French history, and never more memorable, had men but understood it, than in this year 1774—Anne James Turgot had replaced M. de Boynes as Minister of the Marine. Turgot had been Intendant of the district of the Limousin, where he had used his influence to abolish the *corvée*, replacing it by a local tax, and to remove certain oppressive seignorial rights. He had promoted industry and had lessened the hardships of the militia, and when he was called to Versailles those whose taxes he had been appointed to secure “mourned him as a father.”<sup>1</sup> As Intendant he had proved himself an able administrator; he was yet to prove himself one of the world’s great men.

But Turgot was not specially suited to the office of the Marine, and on Terray’s dismissal he was removed from it and made Minister of Finance, while a certain M. de Sartines, formerly head of the police, was appointed his successor in the Marine.

The translation of Turgot to the department of Finance gave great satisfaction. It won especially the approval of the middle class and of the *philosophes*

<sup>1</sup> Abbé Georgel, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 405.



of whom he was himself one, for Turgot did not follow the beaten track either in politics or religion. There was a considerable party in the Church who sympathised with him, but none of the so-called Devout. Madame de Marsan and her followers were no friends to Turgot, and Madame de Marsan was still a power.

The appointment of new ministers, and the disgrace of d'Aiguillon, Terray, and Maupeou was much, but Paris was not yet content. It had got rid of Maupeou, but not of his work. It wished his Parlement sent away, and the old Parlement recalled. "The Parlement," wrote a contemporary critic, "is the only means by which the sovereign can learn the truth";<sup>1</sup> and to those who looked on Parlement in this light that of Maupeou was no Parlement at all. It had been called into existence by the will of Louis XV. in order to carry out his decrees, and was the last body in the world to resist a sovereign's will.

There was, however, another side to the question. Men forgot the difference between Louis XV. and his successor; they forgot also the difference between the Abbé Terray and M. Turgot. "Above all, gentlemen," said Louis XVI., at his first Council, held on the 28th of May, "remember the maxim

<sup>1</sup> *Gustave III. et la Cour de France*, vol. i. p. 282. *Lettre de Madame de Boufflers*.



of St. Louis, 'Whatever is unjust is impossible,'"<sup>1</sup> and on this saying Turgot acted. With a reforming king and a reforming minister, Turgot believed a Parlement that would carry out the king's edicts without discussion or remonstrance was a benefit and not an injury to France. More than this, Turgot knew well that the opposition of the old Parlement had not been altogether disinterested, and that if recalled, it would be more jealous than ever to maintain its traditions and to fight for its rights.

And these were safeguards only where a selfish king issued selfish and interested decrees. If a king, bent on the good of his people, willing himself to sacrifice something of his own privilege, had a minister who in order to secure just taxation was ready to break down class privileges, the old Parlement was all but sure to say, "these reforms touch our rights as nobles and proprietors, and we will not register the king's decrees." Turgot was such a minister; he hoped that Louis was such a king, and he saw in privilege the greatest obstacle to the welfare of the nation. He therefore opposed the recall of the Parlement, and with him was Vergennes.

Nor was the king anxious for the change; he listened to Turgot, and hesitated; but then he listened to Maurepas and decided. To banish the

<sup>1</sup> Falloux, *Vie de Louis XVI.*, p 63.

Maupeou Parlement would be a popular act, and with Maurepas popularity was life.

The usual day for re-opening the winter session of the Parlement of Paris was the 12th of November, and when, early in the month, it was announced that a *Lit de Justice* would be held that day in the old Palace by the Seine, interest and curiosity were keen. The queen, who disliked the idea of so many good men still in exile from their homes, and who had identified the exile of the Parlement with the fall of Choiseul, was in favour of the recall, and most anxious to be present at the scene. She requested that a *loge* might be prepared for her and her ladies in the Grand'chambre, but so great was the popular excitement and so uncertain were those in authority as to what might happen, that Mercy persuaded her to stay away. On the evening of the 11th the king gave her a paper, written by himself, containing the order of proceedings, and the young queen felt flattered by this "so great a mark of confidence."<sup>1</sup>

Next morning the princes of the blood, the peers, the bishops, and the honorary members of the Parlement met in the sombre hall of the Palais de Justice, and there waited the arrival of the king. The ordinary councillors were absent. Everyone knew what was going to happen, and yet expectation and curiosity were on all faces as the

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 265.

king entered. He took his place, and ordered Miromesnil, as Keeper of the Seals, to declare the object of the assembly ; which was to send back the ordinary councillors, the men whom Maupeou had installed, to their original duties as Councillors of State, and to recall the men whom they had replaced. This done, a door leading from the chamber of St. Louis was thrown open, and the men who had left the palace four years ago amid the sorrow of the people, re-entered amid their acclamation, summoned by their king.

They took their places, and the king rose to speak. He had prepared his speech himself, and he delivered it with energy. It was not altogether conciliatory. "The king, my grandfather," he said, "was forced, by your resistance to his repeated orders, to maintain his authority and to see justice open to the people. I recall you to-day to the functions the discharge of which you ought never to have ceased. Realise a due sense of my goodness, and do not forget it";<sup>1</sup> and to these words were added threats of severity equal to that of Louis XV. in case of similar disobedience. The Chambers were not to be assembled except during the usual hours of service, and were only to be summoned by the First President ; if the king replied to a remonstrance by positive denial,

<sup>1</sup> Droz, *Le règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 155.



Parlement must consider this final ; if the magistrates "suspended justice and refused to take up their functions," they were to be tried by a court composed of persons having the right to sit on a *Lit de Justice*, and, if condemned, the Councillors of State were once more to take their place, and might not refuse.

The king's speech, wrote the Swedish ambassador to Gustave III., produced a great impression ;<sup>1</sup> and Marie-Antoinette, writing to her mother, said : "The great affair of the Parlement is at last over. Every one says the king conducted himself to perfection. Everything passed off as one would wish, and the princes of the blood"—exiled from court since their opposition to Louis XV. in 1771—"came to see us next day. It seems to me that if the king maintains what he has done his authority will be greater than ever."<sup>2</sup>

So thought the queen and the courtiers ; not so Maria-Theresa. "It is incomprehensible to me that the king and his ministers should undo what Maupeou has done,"<sup>3</sup> and that the king had undone Maupeou's work was at once evident.

A low murmur of disapproval ran through the assembly as it heard the altered conditions under

<sup>1</sup> *Gustave III. et la Cour de France*, vol. i. p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 253.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 252.



which it was to work, and the Duc de Chartres, eldest son of the Duc d'Orléans, who had led the opposition to Louis XV., openly protested. The very edict which re-established the old Parlement was disliked. Parlement had never ceased to exist, the exiled members muttered, "and how could it be *restored*, even by royal will!"<sup>1</sup>

Its first act was to remonstrate against the new regulations, and nine months later several of these were abolished.

Turgot's prophecy bade fair to be realised.

<sup>1</sup> Weber, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 119.

## CHAPTER XII.

### CHANGES AT COURT.



COMTE DE PROVENCE.

MARIE-ANTOINETTE'S position as Dauphiness had been one of restraint. She had been as much a subject as any citizen in Paris, and had felt the trammels more. No appointment to her household had been under her control ; no pleasure might be planned without asking the king's consent ; while the Comtesse de Noailles, as *dame d'honneur*, had exercised a supervision stricter than that of many a governess. As queen, Marie-Antoinette had no authority superior to her own save that of an indulgent husband ; and naturally enough she determined to profit by the change, and to replace the dull monotony of Versailles by gaiety and pleasure. "Change nothing," Maria-Theresa wrote ; but the

mother's warning was inconvenient, and was therefore disregarded.

The first change introduced was a relaxation of etiquette.<sup>1</sup> In the Austrian court etiquette was severe on state occasions, and in daily life almost dispensed with, but in the French court it had woven itself into the very existence of royalty, and might never be laid aside. Marie-Antoinette did not stop to consider this difference. She desired freedom, and for several years to come the fulfilment of her desires was her end in life. "I must confess my love of pleasure, and my laziness when serious matters are in question,"<sup>2</sup> she herself wrote in July, 1774.

This question of etiquette was a serious matter. Its relaxation alarmed the graver minds who watched the queen, but it delighted the frivolous spirits who wished for nothing better than giddy licence. More dangerous still to Marie-Antoinette, it was attributed to the influence of her mother's court, and gave a handle to those who had already begun to call her "The Austrian."

In this slackening of the bonds of etiquette the king took the first step, while the queen took the second and the third. Almost immediately on his

<sup>1</sup> For details of the etiquette to which a queen of France was subject, see Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 309 *seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 207.

accession Louis XVI. requested his brothers and their wives to cease addressing him as "Sire."<sup>1</sup> The brothers took undue advantage of Louis' kindliness and ceased to pay him proper respect, and by August they no longer paid the customary morning visit of ceremony to the king and queen. At the evening receptions the Comte d'Artois pushed rudely before the king,<sup>2</sup> both he and the Comte de Provence behaving so disrespectfully that no stranger could have said which of the three was sovereign; for indeed the king himself lacked dignity. Notwithstanding this behaviour, Marie-Antoinette allowed her brothers-in-law great freedom. Provence was permitted long conversations during her toilet, and d'Artois was encouraged to make her his confidante. At the same time she neglected the little observances which distinguished her position, and liked, for example, to sit on small low chairs or folding stools, and to leave the arm-chair empty, which it was her place to occupy.

Nor did Marie-Antoinette perform her first public duties with sufficient solemnity. There was in the Bois de Boulogne a royal residence called La Muette. It was a small house, but was conveniently near the capital, and in it Marie-Antoinette received the Parisian ladies who wished to offer condolence

<sup>1</sup> Rocheterie, *Vie de Marie-Antoinette*, vol. i. p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 217.



on the death of Louis XV., and congratulations on her own and her husband's accession. There were quaint and old-fashioned figures among them, and Marie-Antoinette, her gravity disturbed by the amusement of a young and heedless *dame du palais*,<sup>1</sup> did not maintain the dignity expected of her. The Parisians were hurt, and by-and-bye there was circulated in Paris a warning to "the little queen of twenty years."<sup>2</sup>

At this same visit to La Muette, the Duchesse de Chartres, daughter-in-law of the Duc d'Orléans, introduced to the queen a certain Mademoiselle Bertin, famous for dressmaking skill. The dress-maker speedily gained influence over the queen, and in order that she and her art might have full scope, Marie-Antoinette soon ceased to maintain the full etiquette of the morning toilet. Now this etiquette required that the *dame d'atours* should fasten and arrange

<sup>1</sup> Besides her *dame d'honneur* and her *dame d'atours*, the queen had twelve *dames du palais* who were ladies-in-waiting only. The *dame d'honneur* was Mistress of the Queen's Household; she nominated persons to fill the lower posts in the household, received the oaths of fidelity from those who entered the queen's service, sent invitations for the queen's balls, suppers, and the parties made up to follow the chase, etc. The *dame d'atours* had the responsibility of the queen's wardrobe, *i.e.* was Mistress of the Robes.

<sup>2</sup> Petite reine de vingt ans,  
 Vous, qui traitez si mal les gens,  
 Vous repasserez la barrière.  
 Laire, laire, lanlaire, laire.

—Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 91.

the queen's skirt and robe, but Marie-Antoinette preferred the cunning touch of the workwoman to the unpractised hand of an official attendant. But no titled lady possessing the privileges attached to a *dame du palais* would condescend to have as her associate an ordinary dressmaker, however gifted. The queen therefore retired with Mademoiselle to a dressing-room, whither the court ladies were not asked to follow.<sup>1</sup> It was the beginning of a long series of acts which disregarded the prejudices of French etiquette, and alienated the court from the queen.

There was at this time a fashion which Marie-Antoinette followed with very grave result—the fashion of romantic women-friendships. A friend meant less a companion or adviser than an idol; someone whose portrait was secretly carried under one's bracelet, and openly gazed upon when effect required. England and France were equally foolish on the subject, and Marie-Antoinette, like others, must have a friend.

She chose Marie-Thérèse de Savoie-Carignan, Princesse de Lamballe, related by marriage to the princes of the blood, and cousin to the Comtesse de Provence and the Comtesse d'Artois. The princess was unexceptionable in point of rank, but if the queen were to have her as a friend, a suitable post must be found for her at court, and for her Marie-

<sup>1</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 99.

Antoinette proposed to revive an office known as Superintendent of the queen's household. Now, the lady who held that office was so important a person that an order given by the queen could not be carried out until authorised by the Superintendent<sup>1</sup>; and as she took precedence of all ladies-in-waiting, even of the *dame d'honneur*, the susceptibilities of the queen's attendants were in danger once more of being wounded. Madame de Noailles, whose husband was just then appointed Governor of a province, saved her dignity as *dame d'honneur* by retiring, and in her the queen lost a much-needed restraint as well as a sincere if punctilious friend.

Nor was this all. Economy was the cry of the day, and the king had decreased his hunting and table expenses when the queen revived a post which had been suppressed for many years, and which involved a yearly expenditure of £6000. Regardless of expense, of the warning of Mercy, and of the flutter among her own ladies, Madame de Lamballe was appointed. Her post was entirely superfluous, and had no advantage beyond that of providing for the princess; but "I shall make my friend happy," the queen wrote, "which will make me happier even than herself,"<sup>2</sup> and that was enough.

The queen's desire to have a friend with whom

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 386.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p. 363.



she might pass hours free from all constraint was not merely the following of a passing fashion, but was a part of her impatience of the tyranny of etiquette, and her desire to escape from it. This she could not do in any of the great palaces—at Fontainebleau or Compiègne, any more than at Versailles, and she wished for a little palace of her own, where she could invite whom she liked, live as she liked, and move about without the inevitable *valet de chambre* and two *valets de pied*, who must ever follow in her footsteps.<sup>1</sup> Across the gardens of Versailles, a little to the north-west, stands the simple square house which, as the Little Trianon, has since grown famous. It had been built by Louis XV. for his private pleasure, in a garden which had been laid out under the direction of Louis XIV., and in which his successor encouraged the cultivation of rare and foreign plants. On this house Marie-Antoinette set her heart.

The Comte and Comtesse de Noailles knew her wish, and immediately on her accession undertook to secure the king's consent. Mercy, however, disapproving of all intermediaries between the queen and her husband, advised Marie-Antoinette to make her own request, which she did, and it was at once granted,<sup>2</sup> in the summer of 1774.

<sup>1</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 162.



At this time gardening and private theatricals were prevailing fashions in France,<sup>1</sup> and it added to the attractions of the Little Trianon that here Marie-Antoinette hoped to indulge in these amusements. She had no interest in its botanic garden, but took some trouble before deciding in what form her grounds should be laid out. There was at that time a competition between English and Chinese ideas in laying out ground, and after seeing gardens in both styles the queen decided on the English method, with here and there a suggestion of the East. Plans were drawn, and applications made for funds, but these alarmed Turgot, who displeased the queen by refusing any considerable grant until he knew the exact amount required,<sup>2</sup> for here, as in other directions, the queen was beginning to show ominous signs of extravagance.

When the six months' mourning for Louis XV. was over, the king left the arrangement of court entertainments to the queen, which for economy's sake were to be simple; and when the queen decided on three plays and two balls a-week while at Versailles, with no unnecessary expense, it was considered so moderate that it pleased the people and added to her popularity.<sup>3</sup> But economy did

<sup>1</sup> Desjardins, *Le Petit Trianon*, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 270.

not long prevail. The plays were acted by the company of the Comédie-Française, which was officially bound to entertain the court, and by that of the Comédie-Italienne, both of which had their theatres in Paris, and took their companies to Versailles when wanted there. This was considered a justifiable expense, but the court was not always at Versailles; it spent six weeks in summer at Compiègne, and six weeks in autumn at Fontainebleau;<sup>1</sup> and by-and-bye Marie-Antoinette asked for plays all the year round, so that the companies had to follow the court to Fontainebleau and Compiègne, which were each some forty or fifty miles from the capital.

Meantime the schemes of poor M. de la Ferté,<sup>2</sup> to diminish the expense of the entertainments, grew more and more heart-rending. Old stockings were mended, old gauze washed and bleached, and candles replaced by a preparation of oil, which the First Gentleman of the Bed-chamber really thought had no smell, while M. de la Ferté was equally sure it had, and yet he could not pay the actors nor adequately provide for the properties! Then the queen wanted a new little theatre set up at Marly—a small palace near Versailles to which the court often paid a few days' visit—and an additional theatre at Versailles, and both she and the king gave hand-

<sup>1</sup> See note on p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> See page 9.

some presents to the actors,<sup>1</sup> and there was no money with which to pay.

It was the same thing with the queen's balls. When these first began in December, 1774, they were held in Marie-Antoinette's own apartments. The invitations were issued for the season,<sup>2</sup> and the ladies went or stayed away as the queen happened to please them or not. The cumbrous court dress, with its train so long that it had to be rolled tightly up before its wearer could dance, was not required by Marie-Antoinette. Ladies generally went in dominos of white silk, with long flowing sleeves and a very short train, or else they adopted a fancy dress. Gentlemen wore ordinary dress, which curiously enough included a hat kept on while dancing. Neither ladies nor gentlemen were allowed to wear gold or silver on their dress. These balls were held from the very reasonable hours of six to ten,<sup>3</sup> and the grace and good-humour of the queen rendered them very popular.

But their simple character did not last undisturbed for long. The apartments of the queen were soon discarded and a special ballroom prepared, while even so early as the ninth of January, 1775, Marie-Antoinette had decided to introduce fancy-dress

<sup>1</sup> Papillon de la Ferté, *Journal*, pp. 390, 406, 418, 421.

<sup>2</sup> Genlis, *Dictionnaire des Etiquettes*, p. 186.

<sup>3</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 406.



quadrilles. M. de la Ferté was again distressed. "I am much troubled at the expense which the fine trimmings needed for the quadrille dress will occasion," he wrote on January 15th,<sup>1</sup> while Mercy deplored the time devoted to the fancy-dresses and the rehearsals as preventing the consideration due to more serious matters and as rendering the young people of the court too familiar with the queen.<sup>2</sup> Thus in the first year of her reign the seeds of future trouble were sown. Other changes were introduced which also involved a slackening of etiquette, but these were the result of deliberate thought and brought popularity to both king and queen.

Up to the accession of Louis XVI. etiquette had forbidden the queen and royal princesses to eat in company with any men save those of the royal family or a crowned head. Day by day they dined and supped with their husbands and brothers, and no outsider, not even a prince of the blood, was admitted. Etiquette went still further and required that if the queen were the only woman at table, women alone should wait. The *dame d'honneur*, kneeling on a low stool, a table-napkin on her arm, handed the dishes and the wine, which four of the *dames du palais* carried to her. But if any lady of

<sup>1</sup> Papillon de la Ferté, *Journal*, p. 378.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. pp. 280 and 295



rank less than royalty itself were a guest, the ladies withdrew and the comptrollers and gentlemen of the queen's household took their place.<sup>1</sup> This custom of excluding all men, save their immediate relatives, from dining with the ladies of the royal family was somewhat dull both for the ladies and the king. To make amends Louis XV. had indulged in very lively suppers in his own rooms to which he invited the gentlemen who had hunted with him during the day. These suppers had been disorderly feasts and had done no good to the character of the late king, and the Comte de Mercy was most anxious to abolish them. At the same time he felt it was only natural that a prince who loved the chase should like to talk over the incidents of the day with those who had taken part in them. He therefore suggested to the queen and induced her to propose to the king a supper which should be held once a-week from which etiquette was to be banished, and to which both ladies and gentlemen might be invited, while the guests were to be chosen regardless of the old strict rules of precedence.<sup>2</sup>

Such was the origin of the *soupers de société*. The proposal was first made by Mercy in the earliest days of the new reign, while the court was still at

<sup>1</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 101 and p. 176 note.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. pp. 255 and 262.

La Muette, but so novel was the idea, and so counter to old court tradition, that the king waited until the autumn visit to Fontainebleau before he ventured to carry it out. It is significant that even then the day on which the first of these suppers was held was carefully chosen during a temporary absence of Mesdames the aunts.<sup>1</sup>

Once instituted, the suppers became so popular that they had to be held twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, while the desire to extend court favour beyond the bounds of court etiquette had already introduced another innovation.

As the court moved southwards to Fontainebleau for the autumn sport it generally spent a few days at Choisy. Choisy was only a few miles to the south of Paris, and while there, in the autumn of 1774, invitations were sent to ladies of rank both at Choisy and in Paris to spend the afternoon at the palace and to take supper with the royal family.<sup>2</sup> These invitations were cordially accepted. The queen entertained well, and the king surprised his courtiers by the attention and politeness he paid his guests. The capital was gratified, and the queen praised for the marvellous effect she had produced on the manners of her husband, and when, on the expiration of the mourning, Marie-

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 261.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. ii. p. 250.

Antoinette appeared at the Paris Opera, she was received with a welcome which moved her to tears.<sup>1</sup>

The young queen had begun to feel herself someone, and for a queen to be acknowledged a power was, after all, the greatest innovation which had occurred in the court of France for many a year. Mercy and Maria-Theresa saw the change, and used it to press on Marie-Antoinette the interests of Austria; the Choiseul party saw it, and urged on her the return of the Duke as minister; the young courtiers saw it, and made her wishes and her pleasures the excuse for their own. The queen, flattered by the deference paid her, listened to the suggestions of her graver counsellors, acted, if convenient, in their interests, and straightway forgot state affairs; yet, if the ministers were wary in granting her requests, she resented their caution. Her popularity seemed to her a reason for universal sway.

It grieved both Mercy and the Empress that Marie-Antoinette was careless to maintain this growing popularity. She took no pains and showed no desire to increase her influence. She simply enjoyed it, without remembering that she owed it to circumstances and temperament, not to deeds or intention. "I try," wrote the ambassador to the Empress, "to impress on the august princess the importance of

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 283.

fostering her influence ; she listens and believes me, but some amusement or some caprice is sure to engross her, and to lessen the effect of what I say.”<sup>1</sup>

It seemed hard that a queen might not amuse herself, or even be extravagant if she chose. It must, however, be remembered that the court of Louis XV. was bankrupt alike in reputation and in money, and it was this wasted inheritance which it behoved Louis XVI. and his consort to retrieve. A noble task was set before them : to the best of his poor power Louis would have fulfilled it, and might perhaps have succeeded had Marie-Antoinette been of different mould.

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 273.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE CORONATION.<sup>1</sup>



LOUIS DE FRANCE  
(Father of Louis XVI.).

THE ministry had been reorganised and the Parlement recalled, but the king had not yet been crowned.

That event did not take place until June, 1775, more than a year after the accession.

According to old custom the ceremony took place at Rheims. There, twelve hundred years before—on Christmas Day, 496—St. Remi had baptised Clovis, first Christian king of France. As the bishop bent over his convert a dove appeared in the heavens bearing in its beak a little vial filled with oil. With the heavenly oil

<sup>1</sup> For a full description of this ceremony see Pichon, *Sacre et couronnement de Louis XVI.*

Clovis was anointed,<sup>1</sup> and with this same oil the kings of France had, with few exceptions, been consecrated to the service of Church and State.<sup>2</sup>

The city of Rheims has two great churches—the cathedral and the abbey of St. Remi. The abbey is the older church and the more sacred of the two, for in it is the shrine of the great St. Remi, and there was kept the *Sainte Ampoule*, the sacred vessel which contained the sacred oil.<sup>3</sup>

The coronation of a king is generally both a religious and a civil ceremony. In France the religious part was called the *sacre* or consecration, while the civil part was called the *couronnement* or coronation. The whole was so full of curious customs that it is worth while to linger a moment and describe it in some detail.

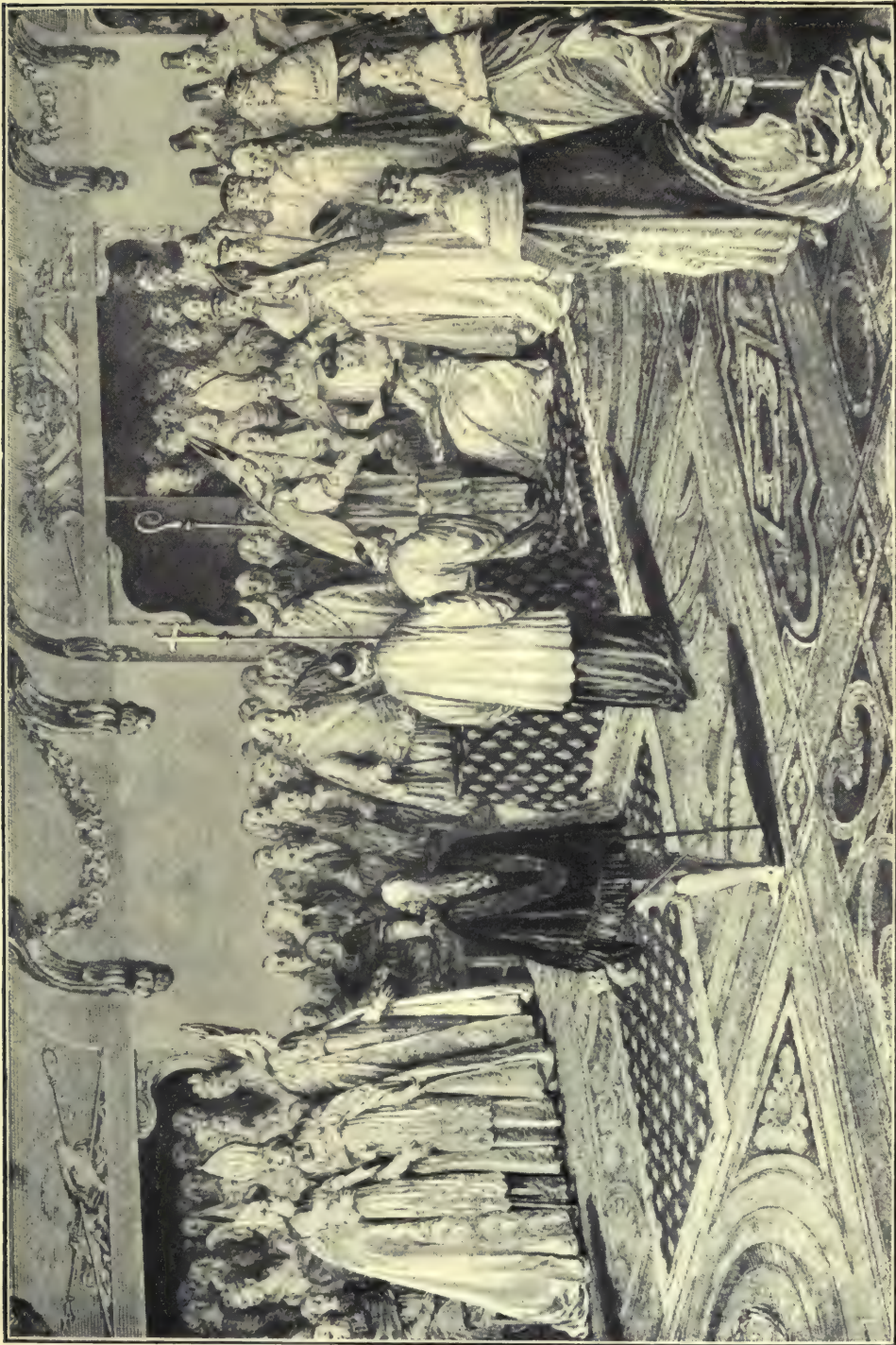
Early on Sunday the 11th June all Rheims was astir. By six o'clock the cathedral began to fill, and already the crown jewels lay beside the altar. These were the crown and sword of Charlemagne, the state sceptre, the hand of justice—an ivory hand set in a golden baton ornamented with rubies and

<sup>1</sup> Anointing forms a part of the Catholic ritual of baptism.

<sup>2</sup> Among the exceptions were Charlemagne, crowned at Noyon, and Henri IV., crowned at Chartres.

<sup>3</sup> Louis XVI. was the last king at whose coronation the original *Sainte Ampoule* was used, for the vessel was destroyed at the Revolution. A few drops of the sacred oil were saved, and are now preserved in a new vessel kept in the treasury of Rheims Cathedral.





CORONATION OATH OF LOUIS XVI.

*From the plate drawn and engraved by J. M. Moreau le Jeune. 1779.*





pearls—the gold spurs with their exquisitely embroidered foot-straps, the large gold clasp or *agrafe* with its eighteen rubies and other precious stones, and, lastly, the book of prayer for the *sacre du roi* bound in silver and gold.<sup>1</sup>

At the entrance of the choir a raised platform had been erected on which was placed the throne, and in the middle of the chancel was the seat on which the king was to take the coronation oaths, and on either side were benches for the peers—ecclesiastical and lay. The queen, Madame and the Comtesse d'Artois, with the Princesses Clotilde and Elisabeth, were in a gallery in the south transept, while the ambassadors and papal Nuncio sat opposite to them. By seven o'clock the peers, the queen, and ambassadors had taken their places, and then the great ceremony began.

The first act was to bring the king. When at Rheims for coronation the kings occupied a set of rooms in the Archbishop's palace. From this building a covered passage had been made leading to the great west door by which the king was to enter the cathedral. But he did not come uninvited.

The peers, rising in a body, went to the Archbishop of Rheims, and asked him to send the Bishops of

<sup>1</sup>The sceptre, hand of justice, spurs, and *agrafe* may be seen in a glass case in the Galerie Apollon in the Louvre. The crown and sword of Charlemagne are in Vienna.

Laon and of Beauvais—as holding the two senior bishoprics of France—to go in search of the king. Whereupon the bishops, followed by two choir boys bearing lighted candles, and a third carrying holy water, preceded by the Master of Ceremony, the canons of the cathedral, and by the choir left the church. Arrived at the king's chamber, the Precentor knocked. A voice, that of the Grand Chamberlain, answered, "whom do you want?" "The king," replied the Bishop of Laon. "He sleeps," was the answer, given through the unopened door. A second time the Precentor knocked, and again the same question and answer followed, but when for the third time the Chamberlain had said, "The king sleeps," the bishop grew bold and cried, "We come for Louis the Sixteenth, whom God has given us for king," and at this the door opened and the bishops entered.

The king lay on a great bed called *lit de parade*. He wore a long white shirt and over that a crimson one trimmed with gold braid, which, like the under shirt, was laced together at all the places where the sacred oil was to touch the most Christian king. Over this was put a garment of cloth of silver, and on his head a black velvet cap, with a band of diamonds, a heron's feather, and a white ostrich plume. The bishops presented the king with holy water, repeated a short prayer, and, raising him from the bed, conducted him to the cathedral.

Meantime another procession had been making its way from the church of St. Remi. While the bishops brought the king, the Grand Prior of St. Remi brought the holy oil. It was no light matter, this bringing of the sacred oil. Its safe return had to be vouched for by a deputation of nobles sent to St. Remi by the king. They swore on the Gospel that no harm should befall the sacred vessel, and offered to remain in the abbey as hostages until its return, although for its greater safety they prayed to be allowed to accompany it, promising to defend it with their lives. And then, covered by a canopy of silver moiré, carried on a silver cushion attached to a chain worn round the Grand Prior's neck, surrounded by priests, escorted by the nobles and guarded by soldiers, the *Sainte Ampoule* was borne from the abbey to the cathedral. There it was received by the archbishop; but not until he, too, had given solemn promise of safe return was it laid on the altar.<sup>1</sup>

This done, the archbishop, accompanied by the Bishops of Laon and of Beauvais, approached the king, who was seated in the centre of the chancel. He asked him whether he would promise to preserve the privileges of the Church, and when the king answered "Yes," the archbishop administered the

<sup>1</sup> Those curious in local history may like to know the streets through which the *Sainte Ampoule* was borne. These were the Rue St. Julien, Rue de la Halle, Rue du Cerf, Rue Neuve, Rue du Bourg St. Denys, and Rue Ste. Catherine; they were all hung with tapestry.



coronation oaths. By these Louis swore to maintain the Church as well as to defend and govern the country. He did more, for he swore to destroy heretics and to punish duelling by death.<sup>1</sup> Turgot, who was liberal towards Protestants, and who objected to his sovereign swearing what he certainly would not perform, would have had these clauses omitted or modified,<sup>2</sup> but Maurepas wished to keep well with the Church, and overruled the king. Louis, therefore, in sympathy with Turgot but obedient to Maurepas, muttered the words in an unintelligible mumble.<sup>3</sup>

There was one question generally asked at this point of the service which was omitted on this occasion. Before administering the oaths, the archbishop usually turned to the people and said, "Will you have Louis to be your king?" But on this last coronation of the old regime the people were disregarded altogether.<sup>4</sup>

While the king was swearing fidelity to the Church and to the country the crown jewels were laid on the altar, and at the altar the coronation robing began.

First came the Grand Chamberlain to put on the velvet sandals, then Monsieur, who fastened on the

<sup>1</sup> For these oaths see note at the end of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> *Notice historique sur Turgot*, xcix. ; in *Œuvres de Turgot*, by MM. Daire and Dussard.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Martin, vol. ii. p. 352, and *Mercure historique*, vol. 179, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> *Mercure historique*, vol. 179, p. 76.



golden spurs. After this the archbishop blessed the sword of Charlemagne, and bound it for a moment on the king, then drew it from its sheath, recited a prayer, and returned it to Louis. The king then raised it point upward, and as he did so the archbishop again repeated a prayer, after which the king kissed the sword, and laid it on the altar. Thus dedicated to the service of the Church, the archbishop lifted the symbol of the civil power, and once more returned it to the king. He received it kneeling, and passed it to the High Constable of France, to hold point upward for the rest of the ceremony.

Then followed the anointing of the king. While the choir chanted and the archbishop prepared the sacred oil, the king knelt on a square of velvet, the bishops of Laon and of Beauvais standing, and the four other bishops kneeling round him. The archbishop prayed, took the ointment on his right thumb, and anointed the king on his head, back, and chest, on each shoulder and each arm, saying as he did so, "With this holy oil I anoint thee king in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

The prayers of consecration followed, after which the king was dressed in tunic, *dalmatique*,<sup>1</sup> and the

<sup>1</sup>The *Dalmatique* is a vestment worn by the deacon who assists the priest at the celebration of mass, and was worn by the kings at their coronation, and other great ceremonies.

magnificent royal mantle of crimson velvet, richly embroidered in *fleur-de-lys*. He knelt again before the archbishop, who anointed his right hand and his left, and, because they must touch the holy oil, sprinkled the king's gloves with holy water, and blessed them before they were placed on the anointed hands. The royal ring was also blessed and put on the royal finger, and when the sceptre was placed in the king's left hand and the hand of justice in his right, the *sacre* was over.

After the *sacre* came the *couronnement*, the actual placing of the crown on the king's head, and for this the service of the State as well as of the Church was required. M. de Mirosmenil, Keeper of the Seals, stood before the altar and called the twelve peers, lay and ecclesiastic,<sup>1</sup> in order of precedence, to be present at this act; and when the archbishop held the crown over the king's head, the hand of each peer helped to support it. But it was the archbishop alone who placed it on the king's head, and who, followed by the peers, led the king to his throne, placed and held him there while the prayers

<sup>1</sup>The ecclesiastical peers were the Archbishop of Rheims, the Bishops of Laon, of Langres, of Beauvais, of Châlons, and of Noyon. The first three were dukes and the last three counts. The lay peers were the Duc de Bourgoyne, represented by Monsieur; the Duc de Normandie, by the Comte d'Artois; the Duc d'Aquitaine, by the Duc d'Orléans; the Comte de Toulouse, by the Duc de Chartres; the Comte de Flandres, by the Prince de Condé; the Comte de Champagne, by the Duc de Bourbon.

of enthronement were recited. These said, the prelate made his sovereign a profound reverence and kissed his cheek, saying three times in a loud voice, "May the king live for ever!" while the peers, one by one, followed his example.

At the same moment the doors of the cathedral were flung open, and the people crowded in to see their sovereign on his throne. The guards outside discharged their salute, cannon fired, music burst from the choir, while little birds, kept prisoners till now, were let loose as a symbol of the freedom of the people under a God-given king. The heralds standing by the throne flung down medals of gold and silver, the "Te Deum" pealed out, and all the bells in the town rang welcome.

The queen had no part in the ceremony, but as the crown touched her husband's head Marie-Antoinette was for a moment overcome, and obliged to leave her place. When she returned, the king's eyes sought her out, and, says Mercy, rested on her with a look of satisfaction, which no one could mistake.<sup>1</sup>

We need not linger over the reviews and *fêtes* of the week, but on Wednesday the 14th June a ceremony took place which regularly followed a coronation and is too curious to omit. On that day the king went to attend mass in the abbey of

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 346.



St. Remi: he went on horseback in grand procession, three led horses following his. Meantime in the abbey park, arranged in long rows, two thousand four hundred sufferers from what was known as the king's evil waited for the king to come and touch them, for it was thought that the Lord's anointed could cure them by his touch. When, therefore, the mass was said, the king, his first physician, a captain of his guards, Monsieur, the Comte d'Artois, the Duc d'Orléans, and the king's almoner performed what was called *le toucher des écronelles*. The king's physician laid his hand on the head of each sufferer, the captain of the guards held the patient's hand folded, while the king made the sign of the Cross from forehead to chin, and from cheek to cheek, saying as he did so, "May God heal thee, the king touches thee."

For the king's comfort, Monsieur was close by, carrying between gold plates a napkin dipped in vinegar. The Comte d'Artois had another dipped in water, while the Duc d'Orléans bore one scented with orange water. When the last patient had been touched, the king returned to the abbey, prayed at the shrine of St. Remi, and then went back to the archbishop's palace.

Next day the court left for Compiègne, and M. de la Ferté presently drove off to Aix-la-Chapelle with the king's velvet coronation robe as a gift to



the tomb of Charlemagne.<sup>1</sup> The crimson shirt and white robe were given in charge to the monks of St. Denis ; but the under-shirt and gloves, having been touched by the sacred oil, were too holy to be used again, and were carefully burned by the archbishop himself.

#### OATH CONCERNING DUELLING.

. . . nous jurons et promettons en foi et parole de Roi, de n'exempter à l'avenir aucune personne, pour quelque cause et considération que ce soit, de la rigueur des Edits rendus par Louis XIV. en 1651, 1669, et 1679 ; qu'il ne sera par Nous accordé aucune grâce et abolition à ceux qui se trouveront prévenus desdits crimes de duels ou rencontres préméditées ; que nous n'aurons aucun égard aux sollicitations de quelque Prince ou Seigneur qui intercède pour les coupables desdits crimes ; protestant que, ni en faveur d'aucun mariage de Prince ou Princesse de notre sang, ni pour les naissances de Dauphin et Princes qui pourront arriver durant notre règne, ni pour quelque autre considération générale et particulière que ce puisse être, nous ne permettrons, sciemment, être expédiées aucunes lettres contraires aux susdites Déclarations ou Edits afin de garder une foi si chrétienne, si juste et si nécessaire ; ainsi Dieu me soit en aide et ses saints Evangiles.

#### OATH CONCERNING HERETICS.

Je promets au nom de Jésus-Christ, au peuple Chrétien qui m'est soumis, 1° De faire conserver en tout tems, à l'Eglise de Dieu, la paix par le peuple Chrétien ; 2° D'empêcher les personnes de tout rang de commettre des rapines et des iniquités de quelque nature qu'elles soient ; 3° De faire observer la justice et la miséricorde dans tous les jugemens, afin que Dieu, qui est la source de la clémence et de la miséricorde daigne la répandre sur moi et sur vous aussi ; 4° De m'appliquer sincère-

<sup>1</sup> *Journal de M. Papillon de la Ferté*, p. 385.

ment et de tout mon pouvoir, à exterminer, de toutes les terres soumises à ma domination, les hérétiques nommément condamnés par l'Eglise. Je confirme par serment toutes les choses énoncées ci-dessus ; qu'ainsi Dieu et ses saints Evangiles me soient en aide.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pichon, *Livre du sacre et couronnement de Louis XVI.*, pp. 41 and 43.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### TURGOT.



MALESHERBES.

THE Parlement of Paris had been recalled, the king had been crowned at Rheims—had been crowned without an appeal to the people; he had sworn as of old to defend church and state and to extirpate heresy. The old regime seemed as firm as ever.

But the Government was deep in debt, its system was riddled with abuses, and the intelligence of the country was growing impatient of abuse. The *philosophes* had spoken out, and they were not alone. Noblemen, and clergymen too, wrote pamphlets and urged reform.

When Turgot became Minister of Finance he found a large deficit and a peasantry ground down

by taxation, but he did not find a poverty-stricken nation. The middle-class was fairly prosperous, many of the nobles and clergy were rich, but there was little public spirit in France. The division of the country into provinces, each with its different regulations regarding taxation, its separate custom-houses and separate tariff, prevented the growth of a spirit of patriotism. The heavy *octroi* charges made on all produce entering the towns from the country divided the interests of the peasants from those of the townsmen, while the incubus placed upon trade by restriction, privileges, and monopoly lay on the people as a deadening weight. "Your nation," Turgot once explained to Louis XVI., "is a society made up of different orders with little in common, and of a people, the individual members of which have few social bonds."<sup>1</sup> Privilege—the privilege of the province, the town, the trade, and the class, was eating out the heart of the people, and to escape taxation was the universal effort. There was little wonder, for the payment of taxes brought no voice in the government of his country to the man who paid.

It was Turgot's aim to change these things. He thought out a great scheme by which the people should have a direct voice in the management of

<sup>1</sup> Daire et Dussard, *Œuvres de Turgot ; Mémoires sur les Municipalités*, vol. ii. p. 502.



local affairs, and at the same time should be represented in the administration of the affairs of the nation, and in this scheme he did not forget the importance of the class who had the greatest stake in the country—the proprietors of the soil.

In his plan of reform Turgot began, as in old days, by a parish assembly; but while in the original parish assemblies every ratepayer was a member, in those of Turgot the members were to be chosen by the holders of land, with the express purpose of representing the landed interest. Above the *assemblée de paroisse* came that of the *arrondissement*, or of several parishes combined, made up of delegates from the parish assemblies; above that again were the *assemblées de province*, formed of delegates from the *assemblées des arrondissements*; and lastly, a grand assembly of the kingdom, whose members were delegates from the provincial assemblies. The first three were to have power to elect officers whose duty it would be to attend to local affairs and to arrange for the distribution and collection of taxation in the parish, *arrondissement*, or province. The grand assembly was to distribute taxation between the provinces—*i.e.* arrange what sum total each province must contribute—decide what money might be spent on great public works, and enlighten the government on the needs of the nation but, like

the States-General it was meant to replace, it could not make laws.<sup>1</sup>

To prepare the nation for such a scheme, Turgot also proposed a council of national instruction, which should have under its control the *Académies*, the Universities, the colleges and schools of the kingdom, and which should have for its aim, over and above ordinary education, to teach the individual his obligation towards society and towards the government.<sup>2</sup>

Such were Turgot's ideals, but before attempting to carry out schemes so far-reaching he had to meet two pressing needs—want of money and want of food. The Abbé Terray had left debt in all directions, and murmurs of national bankruptcy had been heard. Turgot at once made up his mind that there must be no bankruptcy. France must not be dishonoured by shirking her debt, and at the same time there must be no increase of taxation and no loans. To effect economy in the expenditure and in the collecting of taxes was his first effort.<sup>3</sup>

The maintenance of the king's household cost

<sup>1</sup> See Daire et Dussard, *Œuvres de Turgot, Notice historique de Turgot*, vol. i. p. lxxvii. Also *Mémoires sur les Municipalités*, in vol. ii. p. 502.

<sup>2</sup> See *Mémoires sur les Municipalités*.

<sup>3</sup> Daire et Dussard, *Œuvres de Turgot*, vol. ii. p. 165; *Lettre de Turgot au Roi*, 24 août, 1774.

thirty-one million francs, or about one million two hundred and fifty thousand pounds a year. To economise here was difficult because of the private interests affected by each economy. The king had already set the example by reducing the number of tables in the royal household, that is, by having a larger number of the household dine together; he had also put down two of his hunting studs, that for the doe and that for the wild boar, and thus had deprived himself of the possibility of hunting every day in the week.<sup>1</sup> Pensions from the royal treasury were reduced. The Minister of Finance was less ready than heretofore to advance funds to pay royal debts, and superfluous offices were, when possible, abolished.

Economy in the collecting of taxes was as important as in their expenditure. Turgot knew well that there was a grave difference between the amount paid by the nation and the amount which reached the treasury. The difference went to the men to whom the government let out the gathering of the taxes. The system was something like that which used to take place in England with tolls on roads. Certain men, called in France farmers-general, paid the French government so much for the right of collecting the taxes. These men

<sup>1</sup> *Gustave III. et la Cour de France: Lettre du Comte de Creux à Gustave III.*, mai, 1774, vol. i. p. 299.



took care to see that the money to be raised was enough to provide a profit for themselves. "I suppose," says a contemporary writer, "that the farmers-general each gain 50,000 crowns a year, and there are sixty of them . . . I am morally certain," he continues, "that the interest of particular people rather than the good of the State is concerned in the continuance of this system."<sup>1</sup>

The profit was sufficient to build up an aristocracy of wealth, the *noblesse de finance* already referred to. The government saw this, but was helpless, because men like the Abbé Terray had found it convenient to borrow from the farmers-general for the public funds, and the government dared not enforce reform in the proceedings of these men, lest they should recall their loans and ruin the country. Turgot resolved to manage the finances without borrowing, and thus leave himself a free hand in effecting economy in the collection of taxes.

But before Turgot could go far in finance reform he had to face a still sterner evil. On all sides trade was hampered by monopolies, but there was one which brought with it a risk of famine. This was the monopoly in corn. A company of men authorised by the state had the right of buying up and storing corn. The original idea was to provide

<sup>1</sup> *Essai sur les Finances*, by the author of *Secrets des Finances*, British Museum Pamphlets, *Finance*.





TURGOT.

*From 'Tableaux historiques de la Révolution française.'*



against need in time of scarcity, but the company cared only for profit, and used to hoard up the grain until its price had risen to the highest possible, and then to sell in privileged markets. The people nicknamed the company the *Pacte de Famine*.<sup>1</sup>

Turgot had only been a short time in office when this company applied for its ordinary renewal of license. Louis XV. had had a money interest in the *Pacte de Famine*, and it brought a considerable revenue to the treasury,<sup>2</sup> but this year the license was refused. A month later Turgot proposed an order by which trade in corn should be made free within the kingdom of France. Not only the *Pacte de Famine*, but all privileged markets were to be abolished. The king approved of the proposal, the measure was brought before his Council on September 13th, 1774, and on the 20th was made public.<sup>3</sup> This measure, coming as it did in the first early days of the royal popularity, was received with joy by the people, while the manner in which it was introduced created intense interest in the minds of those men who sympathised with Turgot, and, like him, were anxious for reform.

“For such is our good pleasure” had hitherto been

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. ii. p. 221.

<sup>3</sup> Daire et Dussard, *Œuvres de Turgot, Arrêt du Conseil d'Etat*, Sep., 1774, vol. ii. p. 169.

the only reason given by a king for the promulgation of a law. But Turgot, true to his principle of educating the people to a willing obedience, prefaced the law by an explanation of the benefits of freer trade. "We have never yet," said Voltaire, "had edicts in which the sovereign has deigned to teach his people, to reason with them, to instruct them in their own interests, to persuade before commanding them."<sup>1</sup> To do this, to recognise that intelligent comprehension is a desirable part of the obedience of the subject, was in itself reform, and reform which struck at the underlying idea of the old regime. It was because of this as well as in admiration of Turgot's clear statement of the advantages of a freer commerce that Voltaire wrote to his friend d'Alembert, "I have just read Turgot's masterpiece, and it seems to me that it brings a new heaven and a new earth."<sup>2</sup>

Meantime, unfortunately, there was little corn to circulate. The harvest of 1774 had been a poor one, and the prospect for 1775 was worse. The new law did not at once lessen the price of bread for the scarcity was real; the people were hungry and keenly disappointed, and Turgot was blamed.

"The grass is beginning to spring up, go and eat that," said M. Latour du Pin, governor of Dijon, and

<sup>1</sup> See Léon Say, *Turgot*, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p. 110.



the people answered by riot. From Dijon the spirit of riot spread and naturally centred in the capital. The markets of Paris were large, and the market of Versailles which used to have special privileges was a favourite one. At the end of April, 1775, strange peasants were remarked flocking to these markets, and the strangers were observed to talk eagerly and angrily to the buyers and sellers.<sup>1</sup>

On the 2nd of May, 1775, a riot broke out at Versailles, and an angry mob made its way past the Gardes Françaises who guarded the outer, and past the Gardes de la Porte who watched the inner courts, into the Cour de Marbre, where the king tried to speak to them from the balcony of his *chambre de parade*. No one had heard exactly what the king said, but a rumour was spread that he had promised that bread should be sold at a penny a pound, and M. de Beauvau, Intendant of Versailles, unknown to the king, issued an order to that effect.<sup>2</sup>

What the king had really done was to send soldiers to protect the markets and mills in the town, and to write at once to Turgot. That minister was in Paris, working hard to preserve order there. He hurried back to Versailles on the same evening, and next day bread returned to its old price. The

<sup>1</sup> Leroi, *Histoire de Versailles*, vol. i. p. 294.

<sup>2</sup> See the king's letter to Turgot, of 2nd May, in Leroi, *Histoire de Versailles*, vol. i. p. 296, and elsewhere.

good of the people, thought Turgot, was not to be gained by yielding to riot, and the king upheld him. More than this, the Musketeers were ordered to be in readiness should Turgot need them in the capital, the Black to go to the Faubourg St. Antoine to guard the quays and the river Marne, and the Grey to the Faubourg St. Germain to watch the river Seine. For the mob was breaking into bakers' shops, seizing the corn which was stored on the quays, stealing what it could, and in its foolish rage, destroying what it could not steal, and Paris looked calmly on. Its lieutenant of the police did nothing, and M. de Maurepas went to the Opera.<sup>1</sup> M. Turgot, they said, by his new-fangled notions had caused this disturbance, and he was left to quell it as best he could.

And Turgot did quell the disorder. The king held a Council in the middle of the night of May 3rd; the careless lieutenant was dismissed and regular troops were placed in charge of the capital.

The mob was dispersed, many of the ringleaders arrested, and the merchants who had suffered were compensated by a tax levied on the districts in which the riots had occurred. In spite of Parlement which

<sup>1</sup> Monsieur le comte, on vous demande,  
Si vous ne mettez le holà  
Le peuple se révoltera.

Dites au peuple qu'il attende, il faut que j'aïlle à l'Opéra.

—Bachaumont *Mémoires*, vol. viii. 1775.

opposed his law, or the strong party who disliked his ideas, Turgot carried his point. The price of bread was not lowered to please the mob, and the new law was left to work its natural if slow effect.

In Turgot's triumph the king shared. "The people will see," wrote Louis, "that I am not so feeble as I am thought to be, and that I can execute what I have resolved on, and this will make our next reforms easier."<sup>1</sup>

But Turgot's next reforms were on a larger scale and already he had made enemies. Two of the ring-leaders in the bread-riots were hanged, and the men who disliked his policy scoffed and said that the reformer of the corn-laws had a tyrant's heart; while even those who trusted him began to question his ability and to wonder whether his measures were not after all just a little premature. But he was not daunted. He spent the summer in carrying out various small reforms, and in planning the edicts by which his policy was to stand or fall, and these he brought before the king's Council in January, 1776.

The edicts were six in number, and were prefaced by an introduction which gave unmistakable warning of the policy Turgot meant to pursue. It was, as M. Say concisely puts it, "to abolish privilege, and to oblige the nobility and clergy to submit to taxation

<sup>1</sup> Léon Say, *Turgot, Lettre de Louis XVI. à Turgot*, Mai 6, p. 121.



on the same conditions as did ordinary citizens.”<sup>1</sup> By the first of his edicts Turgot proposed the abolition of the *corvée*, and the substitution in its place of a tax on the landholders; by the second and third the suppression of certain restrictions still left on the sale of corn. By the three last he freed trade from many restrictions by breaking down the exclusive privileges of certain bodies, the most important of which were the *jurandes* and *maîtrises*, —societies which regulated the system of apprenticeship which then prevailed in every trade.<sup>2</sup>

The edicts met with strong opposition, for the privileged were growing alarmed. Already during the first year and a half of the new reign three out of the new ministers who had been appointed were filled with the spirit of reform. In July, 1774, Turgot entered the Government; exactly a year later M. de la Vrillière, Minister of the King's Household, was replaced by M. de Malesherbes, while in the following October, H. de Mury died, and was succeeded by M. de St. Germain as Minister of War.

Malesherbes had been president of one of the

<sup>1</sup> Léon Say, *Turgot*, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> The *jurandes* were a body of men elected by the masters of each trade or art to watch over its interests; the *maîtrises* were the societies of masters who decided on the fitness of an apprentice to become a master. Every trade was a strict corporation to which no one was admitted as a master until after four years' service and the execution of a *chef-d'œuvre* which should satisfy the masters. Great abuses had crept into the system.



great law courts, and there had protested against the inequality and uncertainty of the law regarding taxation. He was a noble-hearted and upright man, indifferent as to holding office, but ardent for justice. St. Germain was erratic and moody, but as eager to reform the army as Turgot and Malesherbes were to reform the laws.

When, therefore, Malesherbes prepared edicts to prevent the nobles from escaping their just debts, and St. Germain determined to prevent their buying advancement in the army,<sup>1</sup> and Turgot asked them to contribute to a tax which should replace the forced labour—the *corvée*—from which they had been exempt, there was little wonder that the privileged cried out and were in great disquiet. “The king has published some edicts which will probably cause fresh trouble with Parlement,” Marie-Antoinette wrote to her mother, and she was right.<sup>2</sup>

As Turgot had foreseen, Parlement was foremost in the opposition. It took its old high ground of protecting the rights of France against royal despotism. The laws as they existed, it said, were part of the constitution of the nation, and the king had no power to change them. It defended the old regime against the sovereign himself, and refused to register the edicts.

<sup>1</sup> H. Martin, *Histoire de France*, vol. xvi. pp. 360 and 365.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 425.

“Of whom is Parlement composed? Of men rich in comparison with the people, and noble because their post confers on them nobility. Of whom the court, whose cry is so powerful? Of the great officers of the crown, the greater number of whom have land on which the tax would fall, but on whom the *corvée* does not fall. Of whom does the Paris public consist? Of nobles and of rich men enjoying the privileges of nobility, and these are they whose voice is loudest; and of a people who pay taxes, but neither that of *taille* nor of *corvée*. Therefore neither the remonstrances of Parlement, nor the support given it by Paris, nor the demands of the court ought to prejudice the question.”<sup>1</sup> Thus wrote an anonymous writer, believed to be Malesherbes, in one of the pamphlets which flooded the capital. “Every day,” writes M. Say, “new pamphlets, songs, verses, and skits appeared,”<sup>2</sup> and the assertion is amply justified by the numbers which have survived.

“There is only M. Turgot and myself who care for the people,” Louis once said, and now he summoned the Parlement to Versailles and in a *Lit de Justice* enforced registration.

The *Lit de Justice* was held on the 12th March, 1776. In remonstrating against the edicts the President of the Parlement had declared that Paris was alarmed—the nobles in distress and the bour-

<sup>1</sup> Léon Say, *Turgot*, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p. 145.

geois in consternation. But no sooner did the news of their registration reach the city than the people broke out into rejoicing. The name of the king and of liberty were shouted together, and both were loudly praised. For the first time working men were seen driving about the streets of Paris, thus asserting themselves socially, but they did it as cheaply as they could, for the carriages were very full!

There was reason for rejoicing. Hitherto the powers of the *jurandes* and *maîtrises* had been such that the right of exercising any given trade was almost an hereditary one. In each town or village certain men had the monopoly of carpentering, building, selling, etc., and they guarded these rights as jealously as did ever the *noblesse d'épée* those pertaining to itself; it was all but impossible for anyone not born in the master class to enter it. Their richer neighbours suffered as well as the poorer, for there was no choice of workmen, prices were arbitrary, and workmanship poor.<sup>1</sup> By the passing of Turgot's edict anyone, even a foreigner was, with a few exceptions, free to exercise any trade or business, and might if he chose exercise several.

But if France profited Turgot lost. The very passing of his edicts caused his downfall. He had made enemies in the strongholds of prejudice, and neither the approval of the liberal-minded, the sym-

<sup>1</sup> Léon Say, *Turgot, Preamble to 4th Edict*, p. 149.



pathy of his friend and colleague Malesherbes, nor the support of the king was enough to resist the power of the opposition. And alas! the king's support was beginning to fail. Turgot had compelled retrenchments: he had abolished unnecessary offices and the attendant salaries, and this manner of economy did not tend to make either king or queen more popular at court.

He had offended the clergy. They were angry because Turgot had tried to induce the king to omit that part of the coronation oath which forbade liberty of conscience, and in return succeeded in rousing the king's suspicion of his minister's orthodoxy. "Does M. Turgot go to mass?" the king asked Maurepas. "I do not know, Sire. M. Terray went every day," and Louis, a faithful churchman, grew uneasy.

Turgot had also offended the queen. He had hesitated over Trianon, he had opposed her desire to help her favourites, and especially had displeased her in a matter which excited much bitter feeling at the time. A certain M. de Guines, French Ambassador in London, had become implicated in a charge of smuggling goods under cover of his official position, of gambling on the public funds, and of making profit by the betrayal of state secrets.<sup>1</sup> The ambassador had both friends and relatives at court, some of whom were the queen's intimates,

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 442, note.



and these chose to consider a trial in which their relative was concerned as a personal insult. The queen foolishly identified herself with the supporters of M. de Guines and interfered on his behalf.<sup>1</sup> With the queen sided Mesdames, who disliked Turgot as a *philosophe*, Monsieur, who was a champion of privilege, and the Comte d'Artois, who preferred a Controller-general more ready to open the public purse to a prince's needs.

Thus M. Turgot's hold on the king was slackening, when the registration of the edicts turned against him the whole army of the privileged, and where the privileged led Maurepas followed.

Up to the time of the registration of the edicts Turgot had held to his right to transact business with the king alone; but now that popular feeling was against him, he considered it wise to conciliate the first minister and submit to his presence during a royal audience. By doing this Turgot only threw himself into Maurepas' power.

As a first step towards the dismissal of Turgot, Maurepas made things so uncomfortable for Malesherbes that he, never tenacious of office, resigned. Having deprived Turgot of his ablest supporter, Maurepas now proceeded to render the king suspicious of Turgot's sincerity and sceptical of his ability.

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 442, note.

Turgot saw what was coming, but did not swerve from his course. He urged the king to choose as Malesherbes' successor a friend of reform, and he dared to point out Maurepas' faults and the dangers in which the country stood. His words were very plain. "A feeble and disunited ministry, men excited and uneasy, parlements leagued with court cabals and emboldened by the weakness of the government, revenues below the expenses, everywhere resistance to an economy which is indispensable, no whole-heartedness, no steadiness, no secrecy even in the resolutions of your majesty's councils. . . . If these dangers are not phantoms, your majesty cannot, without failing in justice to yourself, yield" (on point of successor to Malesherbes) "simply to please Monsieur de Maurepas." Nor did he fear to add: "Your ministers think you feeble, Sire, and there have been occasions when I have feared lest you had this failing; but there have been others and more difficult ones in which I have seen you display a true courage."<sup>1</sup>

It was not to be shown now. Bold schemes and strenuous exertion were more than Louis XVI. could long bear. Maurepas' easygoing ways were balm to that feebleness which Turgot would have combated, and Maurepas won the day.

<sup>1</sup> Léon Say, *Turgot, Fourth letter of M. Turgot to Louis XVI.*, pp. 173, 174.

Consistent to the last, Turgot drew up a fresh scheme of reform for the king's household. He did not expect it to be accepted, and it was not. "What! another *mémoire*?" the king is reported to have said. "Is this all?" he added, when the *mémoire* was read through. "Yes, Sire." "So much the better," Louis replied,<sup>1</sup> and on May 12th, 1776, Turgot was dismissed.

In dismissing Turgot, Louis may be said to have sealed his own fate. Serious difficulties lay before him. How to fill the exchequer and yet relieve the taxpayer, how to meet the new ideas and yet maintain the old administrations, were problems too great for the king. Heaven gave him Turgot and Malesherbes, and he let them go. "Turgot and Malesherbes," wrote Mercy, "men who might have changed the destiny of France, fell before miserable and useless intrigues,"<sup>2</sup> and no minister of anything like Turgot's power again entered the government of Louis XVI.

The disappointment to the thoughtful was great. "I have only death to look forward to," said Voltaire, "now that Turgot is out of office."<sup>3</sup> The office had not been held more than twenty-two months, but in these M. Turgot had done noble work. He

<sup>1</sup> H. Martin, *Histoire de France*, vol. xvi. p. 379.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 447.

<sup>3</sup> H. Martin, *Histoire de France*, vol. xvi. p. 380.

had attacked privilege, he had freed the corn trade from restrictions within the kingdom of France, he had opened trade to all men, he had abolished forced labour, and, above all, had first given France the idea of a great national life in which each citizen must bear a part.



## CHAPTER XV.

### THE QUEEN'S SOCIETY.



THE COMTE D'ARTOIS.

THE fall of Turgot reacted on the crown. The promise which Louis had made to the minister when he entered office, "Fear nothing, I shall always stand by you,"<sup>1</sup> had not been kept, while in the breaking of this promise the queen herself boasted her share. Her attitude in the case of M. de Guines was well known in Paris where the affair created much interest, and it was at this time that idlers in the capital first began to gather in groups and discuss matters of government and the doings, real and imaginary, of the royal house.<sup>2</sup> Before these

<sup>1</sup> Daire et Dussard, *Œuvres de Turgot, Notice historique sur Turgot*, lxxxii.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 320.

events were forgotten, Marie-Antoinette's extravagance and frivolity had come to be talked of as unqueenly and denounced as unpatriotic.

The winter of 1776 was bitterly cold, and bread was still dear. Thick snow lay on the streets of Paris and great fires were lighted in the entrance courts of the better houses that the poor might gain a little warmth, and yet the people suffered cruelly. It was then that a gay train of sleighs one day entered the city from Versailles, and with every appearance of wealth, comfort, and hilarity drove through the boulevards of Paris. It was the queen and her courtiers who were enjoying the snow and crisp air, and little blame to them, only it would have been wiser to have chosen another route, and not to have flaunted their gaiety before a shivering populace. It was the first time Paris had seen sleighs, and as it looked it muttered "The Austrian." The incident was trifling, but it serves as a key to much of the feeling that grew up between the people and the queen. Kind-hearted and considerate when her sympathy was roused, Marie-Antoinette yet began her career as a sovereign without any serious sense of her responsibility.

Grave manners and decorous amusements had been looked for in a court presided over by a king who had declared his wish to be known as Louis the Severe, and by a queen whose graciousness and

benevolence were known and loved. But the intoxication of freedom which followed her accession made Marie-Antoinette careless of all save her own pleasure, and launched her on a course of folly which speedily disappointed the hopes entertained regarding the young court. By the changes which she effected in the first few years of the new reign she succeeded in offending both Paris and the graver aristocracy, and in deepening the prejudices of those who upheld the traditional policy. To all these she became the pleasure-loving Austrian whose most innocent innovation was an offence.

The most serious innovation was that already referred to—the inner circle which the queen admitted to her private or *petits appartements*, and to Trianon, and from which she too often excluded her official attendants. To this circle belonged the most frivolous of the courtiers, and to the results of their influence Mercy attributes almost all the evils which fell on Marie-Antoinette.

Only six months after the appointment of Madame de Lamballe as Superintendent, her position as confidant received a serious blow in the advent at court of Gabrielle-Yolande, wife of the Comte Jules de Polignac. This lady first appeared at Versailles in the winter of 1775. She was just twenty years of age, and her quiet manner and simple white dress, her grace and beauty attracted notice. The queen

asked why she had not seen her before, and was told that the Polignacs were not rich enough to come often to Versailles. At once Marie-Antoinette's interest was roused; the Polignacs should be made rich, and Gabrielle-Yolande would prove the friend the young queen yearned for, and whom she had not exactly found in Madame de Lamballe. Alas! in Madame de Polignac she found her still less.

The new favourite had, we are told, the "face of an angel." "The angel," writes Michelet, in bitter scorn, "had a husband who must all at once be made a great officer of the crown to the displeasure of all the court. 'The angel' had a lover, Vaudreuil, an officer to whom was given thirty thousand francs, or £1200 a year. 'The angel' had a friend, a certain d'Adhémar, who demanded no less important a post than the ambassadorship to England."<sup>1</sup> Families of such lineage and position at court as that of the de Noailles had to stand aside and see the Comte de Polignac hold the office which was theirs by right. Place after place fell to the share of the Polignacs. Their debts were paid, and Madame de Polignac was allowed free access to the queen when the *dame d'honneur* herself was excluded. For fourteen years "the angel" did more than any single individual to bring Marie-Antoinette into dis-

<sup>1</sup> Michelet, *Histoire de France*, vol. xix. p. 235.



favour with the old nobility and with Paris, where were circulated pamphlets which compared the favourite to Messalina and other ladies of antiquity of like fame.

Gradually the whole character of Versailles changed. Mesdames in their rooms on the ground floor lived apart and held a little court of their own, where old traditions were carefully maintained. Madame de Marsan no longer ruled in the apartments reserved for the Governess. In 1776, on the marriage of Madame Clotilde, her elder pupil, Madame de Marsan retired in favour of her niece, Victoire-Armande de Rohan-Soubise, Princesse de Guéménée.<sup>1</sup> This lady was the third who shared the queen's favours, and the old political parties of the Devout, the Dubarry and the Choiseul were replaced by the factions of the Lamballe, the Polignac, and the Guéménée—factions from which a political element was yet by no means absent.

In her suite of rooms at the corner of the Aile du Midi, Madame de Lamballe received her relatives of the Palais Royal. The Palais Royal was at this time friendly to the queen, but Mercy mistrusted it and all its ways. "The Duc de Chartres and those who hold by him and by his father," says Mercy, "find a rendez-vous in the salon of the Princesse de Lamballe and I am profoundly suspicious of their doings and

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 352.

intrigues.”<sup>1</sup> It was a new faction at Versailles and a dangerous one.

Round Madame de Polignac, on the other hand, gathered some of Choiseul’s staunchest friends. There was the Duc de Coigny, proud and loyal, “who had never bowed the knee to the Dubarry,”<sup>2</sup> and less worthy, the Duc de Guines, whose cause Marie-Antoinette had so warmly espoused. There was the Baron de Besenval, who by his fidelity to Choiseul, his adroit abuse of etiquette, and praise of a private life, won favour with the queen, but who presumed on this favour, and being rebuked, became finally one of her coldest critics.

In the little set of rooms near the queen’s apartments where Madame de Polignac was first established at Versailles, there was no salon suitable for receptions, and this fact brought about a curious result. For convenience sake she entertained in the rooms belonging to the Governess, and thus welcomed the partisans of Choiseul in the very rooms which had been the stronghold of his enemies and in which Madame de Guéménée now plotted and planned for the advancement of the Rohan-Soubises, a family which, with Madame de Marsan at its head, had been and still was strenuous in opposition to the Duke. But Madame de Guéménée, though ready to scheme

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 397.

<sup>2</sup> La Rocheterie, *Histoire de Marie-Antoinette*, vol. i. p. 267.

for the advantage of her uncles and cousins, was not a politician. About her buzzed and flitted the gayest and giddiest of all at Versailles, and Marie-Antoinette, attracted by the gaiety and thrown in contact with the Governess by the very arrangement of rooms, spent more time with her than Mercy approved. "It is the most vexatious habit that the queen has contracted both on account of the kind of people who frequent the salon of the Governess, and because of their trick of entangling the queen in snares which she does not see."<sup>1</sup> His one comfort was that the innate dignity of his queen kept the gay and giddy set in some measure of restraint.

The dislike felt by Marie-Antoinette as Dauphiness to holding court was no less felt by her as queen. The formal play in the state apartments, the etiquette with which it was surrounded, the old-fashioned courtesies of the older nobility, were more irksome than ever, but the gaming itself had become a passion with Marie-Antoinette. Gradually she grew lax in attending the gaming tables in the great apartments, and resorted instead to the rooms of her favourites, where this new passion and her disregard of etiquette could alike be indulged. Naturally all who were not of the queen's *coterie* felt slighted, and in their turn were not careful to attend a queen who took no trouble to receive them. Besides this, the high play which was

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 445.



now habitual at her tables deterred many of the older nobility, for they could not afford the losses to which play at Versailles exposed them.<sup>1</sup> Thus it was that the state apartments became deserted, and the older nobility stood aloof and criticised their queen while the rooms of the favourites were thronged.

And in the country palaces things were still worse. There was at this period a game much in fashion called *pharaon*. It was a game of pure chance, and as such was forbidden by law ; but the queen had a strong desire to play. She begged the king to allow it for one single night, and Louis, though telling her that even princes of the blood might not play, yielded, since the king "can do no wrong." "Bankers" were sent for from Paris, and in Madame de Lamballe's rooms the queen and her intimates played from the evening of the 30th October, 1776, until the morning of November first—All-Saints' Day. One set of players replaced another, and for thirty-six hours the game went on. "It was only one sitting," said Marie-Antoinette ; "no more than the king had promised."<sup>2</sup>

And if Fontainebleau was bad, the little palace of Marly, half-way between Paris and Versailles, was fast becoming a scandal. Here, more than anywhere, etiquette was forgotten, the card-room

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 497.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. ii. p. 524.



was thrown open to every one ; money, and willingness to lose it were the only necessary qualifications, and swindling actually took place in the queen's presence.<sup>1</sup> The large drawing-room, with its domed roof and its gallery rising all round, became little better than a gambling saloon. Paris watched and made remarks, but the king said nothing.

As an inevitable consequence, the queen fell into debt.

On one visit to Marly she lost a thousand louis, and on another twelve hundred ; and by January, 1777, she owed some four hundred and eighty-seven thousand francs, or about £19,000 in English money. Then becoming thoroughly uneasy Marie-Antoinette decided to ask her husband's help. It was given at once, and without a word of reproach. The king undertook the whole debt, and only asked that he might have time to discharge it, as he wished to pay it from his own private purse, without applying to any of the departments.<sup>2</sup> Week by week he brought a sum to his wife, intended solely for the payment of her debts ; and week by week Marie-Antoinette counted on this, and lost part of it again in play.

Nor was card-playing the only form of gambling which she countenanced. It was the fashion just

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. p. 490.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. iii. p. 7.

then for gay Frenchmen to imitate gay Englishmen, and horse-racing had in 1775 been introduced to Paris by the Comte d'Artois. The queen was present at the first race, and for the next two years was never absent if she could possibly help it. "The race itself is but a poor imitation of those held in England, quite unworthy the presence of the queen; and yet for this she has neglected on three successive Tuesdays to receive the ambassadors and foreign ministers at Versailles,"<sup>1</sup> wrote Mercy to the Empress. Heavy bets were made in the queen's presence, and most unprincely temper shown. Etiquette was once more thrown aside, and men in riding costume were allowed to enter her pavilion.<sup>2</sup>

The public disapproved; it disapproved also of her appearing at the masked balls which took place in the Opera House at Paris. There was something very amusing to Marie-Antoinette in these entertainments—everyone went in domino and wore masks; there was a complete mixture of ranks and no formality. The queen liked to think she was not recognised and enjoyed puzzling those to whom she spoke, but her identity was no secret. She was followed by an officer of the body-guard who never lost sight of her, and attended by a *dame du palais*

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 434 *seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. ii., see pp. 518 and 525.

who kept by her side, and either Monsieur or the Comte d'Artois was of her party,<sup>1</sup> but the ladies of the royal family and the king were seldom there.

It was little wonder that Paris grew cold or that Mercy wrote anxiously to Austria, for the ambassador's advice was disregarded, and he had to stand aside and see his "august princess" slowly undermine her influence with the king, the court, and the people.<sup>2</sup>

Louis indeed indulged her whims. He paid her gaming debts, gave her the diamonds she loved, and paid for those she bought without his knowledge; attended her balls at Versailles, and once accompanied her to a masked ball at the Opera, but he had no pleasure in her pleasures, and disliked anything which disturbed the routine so dear to his soul. The husband and wife were in danger of drifting apart, and for this also the queen's "society" was to blame.

All this caused grave anxiety at Vienna. Letters were written by the Empress and by her son Joseph II., now reigning with his mother. But letters had alas! a very transient effect, and Joseph resolved to visit Versailles and see the queen and her court for himself. He was a ruler who liked to know men and nations, and although he had a

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. pp. 19 and 21. Cp. Maugras, *Le duc de Lauzun et la cour de Marie-Antoinette*, p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, vol. iii. p. 25.



brotherly intention of effecting reforms in the conduct of his sister, he had also political ends in view.

This visit took place in April, 1777, and was awaited by the queen with some trepidation, but when the moment of meeting arrived, the sight of her brother and the awakening of old associations overcame anxiety, and pleasure was her only feeling. He greeted her kindly and stood silent, impressed by the grace and beauty of the little sister who had left Vienna seven years before. Then together they went into the queen's private sitting-room and talked for two hours. The Emperor frankly confessed his admiration, and Marie-Antoinette, touched and pleased, began at once to discuss the points on which she expected advice and dreaded censure. These were the "society" she called her own, her passion for gaming, her entire omission of any serious occupation, and her neglect of the king.

On all these points the Emperor talked to his sister again and again. She listened, but urged excuses for her conduct. Her husband, she confessed, did not interest her. She respected his character, but despised his tastes; she thought Versailles *triste*,<sup>1</sup> Louis preferred it to any of their homes; to her, work was dull and routine hateful, but the king was happy in both; she was young and

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 443. Cp. *Idem*, vol. iii., p. 50 *seq.*



the time for reflection would come ;<sup>1</sup> besides, and this was a bitter cry, she had no children.

Joseph accepted no excuse, though in his heart he found it for the young queen who was so singularly bereft of moral support from the members of her husband's family. An outer magnificence and parade, an inner want of dignity met the Emperor at every turn—in the palace itself, in the private rooms of the royal family, as well as in the rooms of the favourites. He found booths in the galleries of Versailles and on the landings of the staircases, where buying and selling went on,<sup>2</sup> he found rough play and foolish jokes in the rooms<sup>3</sup> of the king and his brothers, disorder and gambling at the races, and he used plain language concerning it. Madame de Guéménée's rooms, he said, were a very gambling hell. He liked neither her, Madame de Polignac, nor Madame de Lamballe.<sup>4</sup> Nor was he favourably impressed with the royal family itself. Madame Adélaïde he admired, and considered a clever woman, but he was wise enough to see that neither she nor her sisters could help the queen. Even less could Madame or the Comtesse d'Artois be looked to. Joseph dismissed the one as full of intrigue, and condemned

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 178.

<sup>3</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, vol. iii. p. 56 *seq.*

the other as a perfect fool.<sup>1</sup> The sprightliness and good humour of this stupid lady's husband appealed to the keen-witted Austrian, and Mercy was disappointed that he did not more strongly disapprove of an influence which in the Count's eyes was most hurtful to the queen; Monsieur was more hardly judged, for Joseph disliked and distrusted him.

In his brother-in-law he found more to respect than he had looked for. He thought him weak, but not a fool, possessing ideas and judgment, but apathetic, and holding to his ideas from obstinacy rather than from conviction, in short, "a mass of general good intentions in great need of a divine spark."<sup>2</sup> He found in him also a generous appreciation of Marie-Antoinette that dwelt tenderly and proudly on her charms.

This the Emperor told her, and the queen was pleased. She promised to be more with her husband and generally to amend her ways, and having given her a set of rules which his sister declared she would keep, Joseph said farewell. "I left Versailles," he wrote to his mother, "with regret, truly attached to my sister. . . . She is charming and lovable, and I spent hours with her and did not notice how they sped."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> *Lettre de l'empereur Joseph à Léopold, 9th June, 1877.*

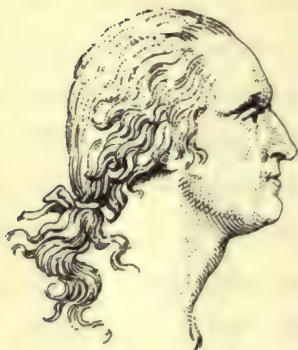
<sup>3</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. p. 86.

For two months there was improvement in the queen's conduct. She began to read, was less with Madame de Guéménée, more impartial in her attentions at court ; she was more affectionate to the king, and took care to spend an hour or two alone with him in the afternoons. But October came, and with it Fontainebleau ; and the love of pleasing those who pleased her, which was, as her brother saw, at the root of her love of play and of much of her frivolity, reasserted itself. Promises were forgotten, the Emperor's letters unanswered, his rules flung in the fire, and it is of the very winter following the emperor's visit that M. de Nolhac writes: "Versailles was quite deserted."<sup>1</sup> The glad content which for a short time breathed in Mercy's letters to the Empress all too soon disappeared ; the old dissatisfaction among the graver courtiers and the murmurs among the Parisians were heard again, while presently a series of incidents over which Marie-Antoinette had little control added to the atmosphere of public disapproval which now began to envelope her.

<sup>1</sup> Nolhac, *La reine Marie-Antoinette*, p. 90.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### FRANCE AND THE AMERICAN WAR.



WASHINGTON.

WHILE these things were going on in France, the English colonies across the Atlantic were rebelling against the English king, and France, who had so lately crowned her king as heaven-sent, sympathised with the rebels.

At first sight it seems unnatural that a royalist country should sympathise with a people who were struggling to free themselves from monarchy, but in the effort of the colonists there were certain elements which appealed strongly to the sympathy of France. America was fighting against what she rightly considered injustice, and the question of justice and liberty, of equality of rights, and of the duties of the



citizen occupied the minds of the thoughtful classes in French society. Voltaire, Rousseau, Helvétius and the rest had not written in vain ; their writings had fired many an enthusiast, and when the great English colonies threw off their old rulers and declared themselves fit to govern without help of king or aristocrat, the experiment was watched with the keenest interest by many a man in France.

But this was not all. The experiment was being carried on under excellent conditions for the observers ; it was being made at a safe distance and against an ancient enemy. It could not touch any vested interest in France as Turgot's reforms had done, and it might afford France an opportunity of avenging herself for the loss she had sustained in the Seven Years' War which had followed the Austrian alliance. If France sided with America, she might yet recover Canada and the West Indian islands, whose loss it was hard to forget,—all the harder that it had been incurred in a quarrel which was not primarily her own, but that of Austria. A hated alliance with one traditional enemy had made her fight against and be worsted by another.

There were indeed men too noble-minded and too deeply in earnest to be affected by such considerations, and whose sympathy in the struggle was as disinterested as it was keen ; but the few do not constitute a national movement ; yet the fact that

America could safely test the ideas France had propounded, especially as the nation which would suffer if the colonies succeeded was an old enemy, went far to render the revolt of the colonies popular in France.

In September, 1775, while Turgot was still in office, the French government sent to England, Caron de Beaumarchais,—he who boasted his twenty years' nobility,<sup>1</sup> and who was afterwards famous as the author of the *Barbier de Séville* and the *Mariage de Figaro*. He was sent to find out the exact state of things between England and America, and to advise France as to her wisest course. His investigations convinced him that England must eventually lose her colonies and that it would be to the advantage of France to help America secretly, until she was in a position to give England open offence. The harder England found it to crush her rebellious subjects, the less attention, he urged, could she give to the proceedings of France, who could meantime quietly strengthen her navy in readiness for the quarrel when it should come.<sup>2</sup>

There was discussion in the king's council as to whether this advice should be followed or not. Vergennes, Maurepas, and the king hesitated. The king had a natural prejudice in favour of the obedience of

<sup>1</sup> See p. 47 note.

<sup>2</sup> Loménie, *Beaumarchais et son temps*, vol. ii. p. 93 seq.

the subject, and was too conscientious to feel at ease in aiding rebellion. Turgot, however, approved of Beaumarchais' proposal. Thinking neither of revenge on England, nor of the rights of kings, but of the good of France, he wished above all else for time to carry out the reforms he had planned. He was strong against war with England, and on this account strong against giving direct help to America. What he wished was to have France left alone, and he thought that the longer England had to fight America, the longer France would be undisturbed. He therefore advised giving the insurgents indirect assistance.

How to do this most safely was a serious question, and here Beaumarchais, never at a loss, was ready to suggest. He offered to carry arms and ammunition as a private merchant to America if the French government would back him up. He needed money to buy and fit up his ships, and he needed also stock-in-trade. For the first, France gave him a million francs, while for the second she allowed him to borrow arms and ammunition from her arsenals; she also promised to help him to dispose of the goods he received in America in exchange for the arms.<sup>1</sup> By this act the French government virtually committed itself not to interfere with any private citizen who might wish to help America and to make a little profit for himself. A commercial

<sup>1</sup> Loménie, *Beaumarchais et son temps*, vol. ii. p. 109.



element was thus introduced into the growing sympathy with the insurgents.

All this happened before Turgot fell. His fall removed a certain restraint from those ministers who desired the war, while the Declaration of Independence, published by George Washington a few months after Turgot was dismissed—on the 4th of July, 1776—changed the political aspect of things. The Americans were no longer rebellious subjects of England but a new and independent nation, and as such France was eager to acknowledge them. In the following December Benjamin Franklin arrived in France, and yet another impetus was given to the desire for war. Franklin was already known in Paris, which he had visited as a young man intent on scientific discovery, and now over seventy years of age he had come as the accredited envoy of America to ask openly the help and recognition of France for the new republic. His arrival was unexpected and was hailed in Paris as the event of the year.<sup>1</sup>

But as Franklin arrived Beaumarchais' ships trading under the Spanish name of Roderigue Hortalez & Company were on the point of leaving France, and Lord Stormont, English ambassador at the French Court, noted both events. Because of his indignation

<sup>1</sup> Parton, *Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. ii. p. 208; cf. Ségur, *Mémoires ou Souvenirs et anecdotes*, vol. i. p. 116.



and remonstrance, France could not give Beaumarchais all the support she had promised and dared not officially recognise Franklin. He, however, was willing to wait. A house was offered him at Passy a little way out of Paris, and there he settled.

Meantime just as Beaumarchais and his ships reached America, another and more famous expedition set sail, and one which combined with enthusiasm for the cause of liberty, the love of adventure and of arms. For over twelve years France had been at peace, and the young French nobles were tired of inaction. The army, we are told, was entirely with the insurgents, and the young colonels who used to gather round the queen's table for play, urged the cause with Marie-Antoinette.

Among these was Gilbert-Mottier, Marquis de Lafayette. He was not of very ancient family, was awkward, rode badly, and was laughed at for his clumsiness when he took part in the queen's quadrilles. But he began the world with a sincere love of liberty and an implicit faith in himself. He chose his associates from those best fitted to add to his prestige, kept a good table and entertained freely, and before he was seventeen had married Adrienne de Noailles, good and charming, and of rank to admit him to the highest circles.

On the 26th of April, 1777, before he was yet twenty, Lafayette sailed for America, confident in

the cause of liberty and in his power to aid it. He sailed against the orders of the king and without daring to bid farewell to his wife. She—perhaps the more truly heroic of the two—neither resented this nor any other hardship in which her husband's career involved her. She remained quietly in her father's house close to the palace at Versailles, and there heard the secret admiration which Lafayette's conduct excited in the younger courtiers and in their queen.

Lafayette and Franklin appealed to the romantic element in the French character. The American had a marvellous art of pleasing and of keeping his end in view. He flattered and was flattered. His house became a place of pilgrimage; "when he attended the operas and plays he passed to his seat amid the acclamations of the people—an honour seldom paid to their first princes of the blood," wrote Silas Deane, his admiring countryman, while Franklin himself tells his daughter of the pictures, busts, and prints which "have made your father's face as well known as that of the moon," and of the medallions in his honour set in snuff-boxes and worn in rings.<sup>1</sup>

The age of salons was not over, and in those of Madame Helvétius, wife of the *philosophe*, and of Madame Necker, wife of Turgot's most famous successor, Franklin was a specially honoured guest;

<sup>1</sup> Parton, *Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. ii. p. 214 *seq.*

but he was welcome everywhere, tolerant of all parties and of much adulation. Entertainments were given him at which, says Madame Campan, the most beautiful woman out of three hundred crowned him with laurels and kissed his cheeks.<sup>1</sup>

It was not all in Franklin's honour, but in great part in honour of his country. Society talked, thought, and wrote of the Americans. Women wore head-dresses carefully composed *à l'insurgent*, and men threw aside the English game of whist and played "Boston" in its stead. Strange to say it was the upper classes, those who enjoyed and guarded the privileges of the old regime, who were most ardent for America, for the ardour was very largely a fashion, and it was a fashion to which patriotism contributed. The Comte d'Estaing, afterwards commander of a squadron in the French fleet, and his friend M. de Maillebois, for example, wrote a memoir in which they declared that the reign of Louis XVI. must be judged by his determination to use or to leave unused this opportunity of lowering the pride and pretention of a rival power, and they asked Marie-Antoinette to present their memoir to the king.<sup>2</sup>

There were, however, dissentients. "I am not interested in your Americans," wrote Madame du Deffand, the correspondent of Horace Walpole and

<sup>1</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 233.

<sup>2</sup> La Rocheterie, *Histoire de Marie-Antoinette*, vol. i. p. 426.



an intimate friend of the Choiseuls, "I am not interested in your Americans; I don't know why, . . . perhaps for the pleasure of being contradictory."<sup>1</sup> "Are not your sympathies," a lady asked the Emperor Joseph while in Paris in the spring of 1777, "with those dear Americans?" "No, madame," was the reply, "it is my rôle to be a royalist."

Notwithstanding the popular feeling, America had been independent for a year and a half before France decided to acknowledge her as a nation. But at length an opportunity arose which gave Franklin fresh ground for pleading his cause. In October, 1777, at Saratoga the English general, Sir John Burgoyne, was hopelessly surrounded and forced to lay down his arms, and there seemed a possibility that England would conclude a peace. If France would not now openly recognise and help America, England, said Franklin, would make peace with Washington, and both England and America would fall upon France—the first because she had helped America at all, the second because she had helped her so little.

Vergennes, however, hesitated, and with him the king. Louis continued reluctant to acknowledge a government which owed its very existence to acts considered by him disloyal. It was no foreboding of the future, but simply a sense of duty to his order

<sup>1</sup> Madame du Deffand, *Correspondance avec la Duchesse de Choiseul, Letter to H. Walpole, 12th November, 1777*, vol. iii. p. 306.



that made him hesitate. But as usual, Louis only hesitated, the desire for war was intense, and at a Council held on January 21st, 1778, he consented to a treaty with America. The same evening the queen was presiding at one of her weekly balls, and the Comte de Provence took the news straight from the Council chamber to the ballroom. The English ambassador was present, and was instantly aware of a change in the spirit of the assembly. Animation and excitement pervaded the room, groups of the younger men gathered here and there and held low-toned conversations, while the delight of the Comte d'Artois was under no restraint—France had acknowledged America and the break with England had come.

Two months later a novel sight was seen in the *Ceil-de-Bœuf*. Benjamin Franklin and his colleagues, Silas Deane and Arthur Lee, accompanied by M. de Vergennes as Minister of Foreign Affairs, waited to be admitted to the king at the hour of his morning toilet. They came as envoys of the new power whom France had recognised by treaty, and were required to wear court dress; but Franklin had not found this convenient, and waited in plain black velvet suit, without wig and without sword. He meant no disrespect to the king of France, but the incident was unprecedented. For a moment the Chamberlain thought of refusing him admittance, but

Franklin was the hero of the day, and thus attired, without any of the ceremonial always insisted on, he entered the presence of the king "to the ecstatic applause of Europe."<sup>1</sup> So writes his admiring biographer, and if the words are exaggerated it is at least true that no other than an American durst Vergennes have thus introduced to his sovereign.

Into the details of the war which followed the recognition of America we need not enter. The victories and the defeats of France are of little importance compared with the spirit which brought about the war and the distress it caused the French treasury. From first to last it was a thoroughly popular war. It lasted from 1778 until 1783, and it was not confined to helping the American colonists against England, but broke out in India and the West Coast of Africa, wherever indeed French and English found themselves side by side. It had been opposed by Turgot because of the expense, and because he considered France had more crying needs than that of revenge on England, and for the same reasons Necker was lukewarm, but on the nation these things did not weigh. There was even among the French nobility a spirit of reckless bravado. One of England's ablest admirals was in 1780 detained in France a prisoner for debt. "If I were at liberty and in command of the British

<sup>1</sup> Parton, *Life of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. ii. p. 312.



LAFAYETTE.

*From 'Tableaux historiques de la Révolution française.'*





navy," he said to the Maréchal de Biron, uncle of the brilliant but frivolous Duc de Lauzun, "I should soon destroy the fleets of both France and Spain." "Try, sir," said Biron, "you are free," and with his debts paid by his French friend, Rodney returned to England.<sup>1</sup>

For a time events went well for America and for her ally, and in October of 1781 the French and American troops gained a decisive victory over England. It took place at York Town in Virginia, where Lord Cornwallis, the English commander, was hemmed in by land and sea, and where with eight thousand men he was forced to capitulate. Washington was general of the insurgent troops, but under him were Lafayette commanding American soldiers, Rochambeau, Viomesnil, and Saint-Simon commanding French, while at the mouth of the river on which the town was built lay the French fleet.<sup>2</sup> "One long shout of joy," writes Henri Martin, "resounded throughout America; after God, a whole people acknowledged France as author of its deliverance."<sup>3</sup> "Humanity," said Lafayette, "has won her cause: henceforth Liberty can never be without a refuge."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> H. Martin, *Histoire de France*, vol. xvi. p. 447.

<sup>2</sup> Droz, *Histoire du règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 346.

<sup>3</sup> H. Martin, *Histoire de France*, vol. xvi. p. 463.

<sup>4</sup> Lafayette, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 50.

It is to the honour of France that reverses did not chill her ardour. In April, 1782, the French and English fleets met near the island of St. Domingo in the West Indies. At the head of the English fleet was Rodney, and under him Hood and Drake; while commanding the French were de Grasse, de Vaudreuil, and de Bougainville. De Grasse was a brave man but an incompetent commander. The wind was against him, and Rodney's threat was at length fulfilled. After a fight which lasted ten hours—a fight in which the French showed splendid pluck—he sailed into Jamaica with the French admiral as his prisoner. The French had lost three thousand men, six ships, and six captains. On the admiral's ship alone four hundred had been killed, and when his flag was lowered only three men stood unwounded on the bridge, nor was it the fault of de Grasse that of those three he was one.<sup>1</sup>

To this defeat France replied by patriotic gifts. Beaumarchais was in Paris when the news came, and immediately employed men to visit the cafés and there raise a cry for subscriptions to carry on the war, while he boasts that he himself wrote to every Chamber of Commerce in the country suggesting that each great town should furnish a new ship, and forwarding to each town one hundred louis with

<sup>1</sup> Droz, *Histoire du règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 361.

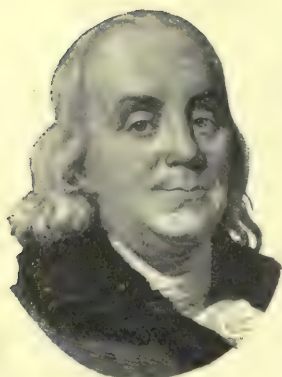
which to begin the gift.<sup>1</sup> And whether by Beaumarchais' agency or not, patriotic offerings, which had already begun in 1779, flowed in freely. The authorities of the city of Paris at once offered the king a ship of the line. Subscriptions poured in both from corporations and from private citizens, enough, says Henri Martin, to add fourteen vessels to the fleet.<sup>2</sup> But patriot gifts were not enough, and for the causes which contributed most to the peace with England we must turn to the internal affairs of France.

<sup>1</sup> Loménie, *Beaumarchais et son temps*, vol. ii. p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> H. Martin, *Histoire de France*, vol. xvi. p. 471.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### NECKER.



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

THE years during which France fought with America against England were the brightest years in the reign of Louis XVI. The queen's "society" was at its gayest, the army and navy were in high repute, scientific discoveries were being

made, trade was encouraged and the liberal ideas taught by the *philosophes* received a fresh impetus by the return of Voltaire to Paris and by tidings of the events which were occurring in America. But how long these prosperous days could continue depended almost entirely on what manner of man was Minister of Finance. The king was right when in his first edict he declared that the happiness of his



people depended on a wise administration of the finances of the kingdom,<sup>1</sup> but he did not yet see that on this also depended the security of his throne. So long as money could be found with which to carry on the government, the new forces which were working in France might continue to work quietly, but so soon as money failed conflict was inevitable. The middle class was growing in wealth and influence; men's minds were awakening to ideas of equality, of the rights of the individual, and of a new untried liberty. Their favourite authors were the Roman writers of the period of the republic.<sup>2</sup> If money failed, and new taxes were imposed, the country in such mood would not long consent to leave privilege untouched, and how keen a contest would ensue the fate of Turgot had foreshadowed!

Meantime contest was the last thing which the king or Maurepas desired, and Turgot's immediate successor was chosen as likely to conduce to the peace of Versailles rather than to the welfare of the nation. It proved a miserable choice. M. de Clugny, the new minister, was unenlightened as a statesman and incompetent as a financier. His policy was one of reaction, and in this both Maurepas and the Parlement supported him. The *corvée* was re-established,

<sup>1</sup> See p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> See *Œuvres de Camille Desmoulins*, vol. i. p. 4, edition of the Librairie de la Bibliothèque nationale.

the restrictions on trade reimposed and the finances again thrown into disorder. And yet Turgot's work was not all undone. His edicts had been too much in accordance with the wants of the country to be utterly disregarded, and in re-establishing the *corvée*, the corn-laws, and other restrictions, the king made certain modifications which henceforth rendered these laws less onerous to the people.

Happily for himself and for his country M. de Clugny did not remain long in office. After four months' administration he died and left the exchequer in such a state of disorder that Maurepas was this time compelled to set aside considerations of acceptability to Parlement or even to Versailles, and to choose a successor who was above all things skilled in finance. He chose Necker, neither an aristocrat, a Catholic, nor a Frenchman, but a Swiss, a Protestant, and a banker. The banker, however, had proved himself so able in managing money that Maurepas was justified in appointing him to the most important office in the government of France.

As a Protestant, Necker was debarred from taking part in the councils of the king, and could not therefore defend his own measures when submitted to the judgment of his colleagues. The disqualification was extremely annoying to Necker; but it suited Maurepas, for it placed the new minister very

completely under his control. "I remember still," Necker writes in 1791, "M. de Maurepas' long dark staircase which I used to mount anxious and despondent, uncertain how he would receive the schemes I had to propose. I remember still the cabinet right under the roof of the palace and over the apartments of the king where I had to discuss questions of reform and economy with a minister grown old in the extravagances and usages of the court. I remember the *finesse* which I had to employ, and how, repulsed time after time, I at last succeeded in obtaining anything for the public good only because I had been able to bring money to the treasury in a time of war. I remember yet a certain shame I experienced when I found myself unfolding to him some of the great moral ideas with which I was myself animated."<sup>1</sup>

But notwithstanding anxiety and despondency in mounting Maurepas' stairs, Necker was full of hope. He had excellent intentions for the good of France and an excellent opinion of his own ability. "Undoubtedly," he wrote in 1784 when reviewing his work as minister, "undoubtedly the men are rare who combine all the qualities necessary to a great administration, especially that of finance,"<sup>2</sup> and of

<sup>1</sup> *L'administration de M. Necker par lui-même*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Necker, *De l'Administration des finances de la France*, Introduction, p. 39.



these men he believed himself one. Faith in himself, "a belief that events and men must naturally yield themselves to his direction,"<sup>1</sup> was his inspiration, and he accepted office tolerably secure that where Turgot had failed he would succeed.

At first sight Necker's policy seemed a continuation of that of his great predecessor. Like Turgot he determined not to increase taxation, but to economise in the details of administration, in the expenses of the royal household, and in the system of collecting taxes. Necker, however, found himself face to face with an expensive war for which economy alone could not provide, and before he had been three months in office he asked the Parlement of Paris to register an edict empowering him to borrow. Parlement, ready to support a minister known to have been critical of Turgot's methods and influenced by the enormous confidence which Necker's skill in finance inspired, registered without remonstrance, and the system of loans which Turgot had condemned was resumed.

For the moment Necker seemed justified. The demands of the war were great, and further taxation of the people was as much opposed to the policy of Necker as it was in itself almost impossible; while, as a foreigner and a Protestant, it was difficult for him to attack privilege and make the privileged pay.

<sup>1</sup> Malouet, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 247.



But history has justified Turgot. Necker's system of borrowing without also imposing new taxes encouraged France in national extravagance—in a rash continuation of the war; for money, men said, was easy to raise, and no one had to pay. Some one must always pay, and Necker has been severely blamed for imposing on the future a tax too heavy for the country to meet.<sup>1</sup> Even at the moment of registration, in the height of his first popularity, one magistrate protested, but protested in vain, and the new minister's very skill in finance became an instrument of evil to the country he was called on to save.

Meantime economy was not forgotten, and here Necker began by discharging outstanding debts and insisting on the prompt payment of accounts. This was in itself a saving, since the tradespeople, accustomed to the Abbé Terray's careless and procrastinating methods, had indemnified themselves by mounting their bills as high as was possible. "Necker," says the historian Droz, "impoverished many tradesmen by the prompt payment of their accounts,"<sup>2</sup> but he very materially enriched the treasury.

There was disorder also in the manner of making payments. All money was not paid from one office, and this was especially true of money given as

<sup>1</sup> Mirabeau.—See his two *Lettres sur l'administration de M. Necker*.

<sup>2</sup> Droz, *Le règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 279.

pensions or gifts from the king, which in many instances were paid to the same courtiers from several *bureaux*. Necker therefore arranged that all treasury moneys should be paid through one office, and thus economised at once by reducing officials and by preventing double payments or favours. He also persuaded the king to promise no fresh pensions or gifts until the year was ended, and king and minister could know what money there was to spare ; while in the collecting of taxes alone he effected a saving of fourteen million francs a year by a decree which limited the profit the farmers-general might make. Finally, like Turgot, Necker set himself to the reform of the king's household, but he did this on a much larger scale. He did not hasten over the task, and it was not until September, 1780, that a decree was published which reduced the service of the household by four hundred and six posts.<sup>1</sup>

All these things were disappointing to the courtiers. They had welcomed Necker because they understood he was so clever a man that he could raise money without having recourse to troublesome economies, and they resented the changes made. There were courtiers who had been accustomed to make any change of fortune, any family event, an occasion for a royal benefit ; and there were others who valued

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. p. 398.

their position in the *Maison du Roi*, not because of the honour it conferred, but because of the money they could make from the sale of inferior posts under their charge. Of all these Necker made for himself enemies.

Nor was the Parlement long content. In November, 1777, Necker proposed to relieve the people by a more just payment of the *vingtièmes*.<sup>1</sup> This tax was not one from which the privileged were supposed to be exempt, but they had contrived very largely to evade it, and when the king signed a decree ordering a *verification* of the returns of every man's income, so that each might pay his due share, the Parlement rebelled. Justice to the people was injustice to the privileged. The *vingtième*, they contended, was a gift given to supply special needs, and every man had a right to say how much he would pay. It was the ever-recurring story of self-interest, and from this time forward Necker was no longer secure of the support the Parlement had at first so readily given.

There followed the question of provincial assemblies. The distress and poverty in certain districts of France were very great, and in such districts the collecting of taxes was an unproductive as well as a painful task. Necker, anxious to raise the money and also to alleviate the suffering, fell back on Turgot's idea of local assemblies, to which should be

<sup>1</sup> See p. 50.



entrusted the collecting of the taxes, as well as the management of local affairs.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the difference of policy between the two men is nowhere better illustrated than in their treatment of a scheme of local assemblies. To the one it was a great idea, to the other a useful and beneficent instrument. Turgot's plan included the whole of France, Necker's was an experiment to be applied to four provinces. Turgot's scheme began with the parish and ended in a central assembly in which parish, *arrondissement*, or province were represented, and where the necessities and resources of all districts of France could be compared and made known to the king. With Necker the assemblies began and ended in the province, and each assembly was a thing in itself, thus tending to intensify rather than to weld the opposing interests of the various districts of the kingdom. Necker's scheme had not the unity of Turgot's, nor had it the educative power.

"It was not representatives of the people," wrote Necker in 1784, "that were needed for these administrations, but men worthy of the confidence of the people and of the monarch."<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, setting aside Turgot's grand aim of training the nation to the responsibilities of citizenship, he advised

<sup>1</sup> See Necker, *De l'administration des finances de la France*, vol. i. chapters xix. to xxi., for his scheme of provincial assemblies.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. i. p. 397.



the king to choose a certain number of proprietors, "the best known and most respected in each province,"<sup>1</sup> as members of the new provincial assembly, and to commission these to choose others to work with them. It was not from the parish upwards as with Turgot, but from the king downwards.<sup>2</sup> "The preambles of edicts," wrote Necker in the introduction to his *Administration des Finances*, are the words of "a great king who must not for a moment forget his power, but who calls on his subjects to understand the purity of his motives, the benevolence of his intentions, the justice of his wishes, the wisdom of the means he employs."<sup>3</sup> His was still a reminiscence of the spirit which cried, "See, my lord, see these people; they are yours."

There was yet another difference between Necker and Turgot in this treatment of local government, and to appreciate its significance it will be well to turn for a moment to certain old institutions in France, the *États* already referred to.<sup>4</sup> France, like other European countries, had been gradually built

<sup>1</sup> Necker, *De l'administration des finances de la France*, vol. i. p. 396.

<sup>2</sup> It should be remembered that Turgot as much as Necker would have disapproved of a representative *legislative* body. But these bodies were not legislative; they were administrative, and were intended also to give the people an opportunity of expressing their grievances.

<sup>3</sup> Necker, *De l'administration des finances de la France*. Introduction, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 35.

up out of small states each with its own government or *État*. The oldest part of the kingdom is Paris and the Isle de France, and from this centre the early kings gradually extended their dominions by right of conquest, and the provinces thus added lost their old *États*, or, what was virtually the same, had them suspended. A little later there was accession of territory by treaty between the kings and provinces on the borders of France. These provinces became part of the kingdom on better terms than the former. They bargained for a continuance of their old rights—for a certain amount of government by their own states, and from the first they held a more independent position than the lands gained by conquest. Such provinces were called *Pays d'État*, and were six in number, Languedoc; Brittany; Burgundy; Provence;<sup>1</sup> Flanders and Artois; the Comté de Foix, Bigorre, and Béarn.

Now all these *États* like our own Parliament, were made up of members of the three orders of society, the clergy, the nobles, and the commons, while the constitution of the States-General, or great assembly of the kingdom was on the same principle. But partly because the descendants of nobles remained noble in every succeeding generation, and partly because of the exemptions which the nobility and

<sup>1</sup> Provence had lost its old *État* in 1639, but had an *Assemblée générale des communautés*, which corresponded to an *État*.

clergy claimed, the division of the classes was more marked and the conflict of interests much greater than in England. Turgot, therefore, seeing that the interests of the classes were apt to interfere with the needs of the province, determined to set aside the old system, and to decree that no one should become a member of an assembly, whether of the parish, the *arrondissement*, or the province as a clergyman, a noble, or commoner, but simply as representing the land.<sup>1</sup>

Necker reverted to the old system, but he made one advance, for he decided on a definite proportion between the numbers representing the three orders. In the old États there was no rule.<sup>2</sup> In Brittany and Burgundy, the commons, or as they were always called in France, the Third Estate, was in a minority, in Flanders it managed affairs with little help from nobles or clergy, while in Languedoc—perhaps the best managed of all the provinces in France—the number of the Third was equal to that of the clergy and nobles combined. On this model, then, Necker planned his provincial assemblies, giving the Third Estate what was afterwards known as double representation, and also allowing a larger proportion of nobles than of clergy.

<sup>1</sup> Droz, *Le règne de Louis XVI.*, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> See Lavergne, *Les Assemblées provinciales sous Louis XVI.*, chapters xxx.-xxxv. for constitution of the states.



Necker hoped in time to provide each province which did not belong to the *Pays d'États* with a provincial assembly, but in the meantime made arrangements for Berry and the Haute-Guyenne as a first experiment, which he chose because the condition of the people was more miserable there than elsewhere in France. The results justified the experiment and pleased the minister, who as much as his sovereign desired the good of the people.

Meantime other reforms were carried out. The French proprietors and the king as a proprietor still held many serfs on their lands. Had Necker had his own way he would have signalled his ministry by making serfdom cease throughout France, but to this the king would not consent. For Louis, notwithstanding his love of the people, had an obstinate determination not to interfere with the rights of his subjects even when these had grown into abuses. He therefore freed his own serfs and left it to the nobles and clergy to follow his example as they pleased; only a few did so at once, but in 1787 we read that serfdom was virtually extinct in France.

Still more important was a change made by Necker in the law regarding the imposition of the *taille*.<sup>1</sup> Hitherto the *taille* might in any district be increased at any moment by a simple order of the

<sup>1</sup> See p. 48.





NECKER.

*From 'Tableaux historiques de la Révolution française.'*



king's council, and had been so raised from time to time, until in certain districts it had become a burden well-nigh intolerable. There were parts of France where the burden was such that proprietors forsook their lands rather than pay the *taille* imposed on these lands, and did it so frequently that a law was made forbidding them to abandon at one time all the lands they held in one commune.<sup>1</sup> This grievance was removed by Necker's edict of 1780, which made it illegal to increase the *taille* except by sending the order of Council to be registered in the Parlement of the district.

And there were other benefits conferred upon the people. Restrictions were removed from trade, reforms were effected in the hearing of lawsuits; horse-stealing was no longer to be punished by death, and enquiry was made into the arrangements of the hospitals. These, alas! were miserably bad. Three and even four patients were found in one bed, and of these one was perhaps dying and another already dead.<sup>2</sup>

Meantime France was fairly plunged into the war with England, and Necker was still borrowing, but the *éclat* of his appointment was now a thing of the past; his economies worked slowly, and money had again become difficult to raise. Necker, however,

<sup>1</sup> Laverigne, *Les Assemblées provinciales sous Louis XVI.*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Mercier, *Tableau de Paris. L'Hôtel-Dieu.*

was not without a resource. Hitherto the accounts of the revenue and of the expenses of the government had been kept secret. Such matters were considered "the king's business," and as such known only to him and to his minister. Necker now proposed to publish a statement of the national accounts. It was a bold step; he himself calls it an era in finance,<sup>1</sup> and it was indeed his one original political act. By it he hoped to banish fears and to see money freely lent, for if men did not know how money was spent, how could they, he urged, be willing to furnish it? The king consented, and in 1780 the *Compte rendu* appeared.

Its publication was an enormous success. "It was," it has been said, "so new a thing for Frenchmen to know anything of the national finance that they forgot to criticise, and read with admiration and delight." The excellent qualities which Necker in the course of his works ascribes to himself seemed justified by his figures, and who could doubt the figures of so great a financier and so excellent a man? No one at first; but Maurepas, offended that he, the first minister, with whom Necker was obliged to consult, was not once referred to in the great book, walked about the corridors and state apartments at Versailles and asked the men and women he met there whether they had yet seen

<sup>1</sup> Necker, *De l'administration des finances de la France*, Intro. p. 52.



the *Conte bleu*.<sup>1</sup> It was a clever way of disparaging the minister's work, for *conte bleu* is used in France of a slight and not very credible tale, and Maurepas thus insinuated that the *Compte rendu* was little better than a fairy-story of finance.

But Maurepas did more. In 1778, when preparing his scheme for the provincial assemblies, Necker wrote a *mémoire* on the subject intended only for the king's eye. In this *mémoire* he had accused the parlements of being neither so learned nor so public-spirited as they were believed to be, but of trading on their old reputation for independence and justice to keep for themselves a power which Necker as well as Turgot considered hurtful to the nation; consequently he urged as one reason for the institution of provincial assemblies that they were likely to prove more popular than the parlements, and so to deprive the latter of the popular support which gave them their undue influence.

Of this *mémoire* Maurepas sent a copy to six of the most influential members of the Parlement of Paris.<sup>2</sup> The effect was immediate. An edict for creating a third provincial assembly was before the Parlement when Maurepas' copies arrived. Parle-

<sup>1</sup> Droz, *Le règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 298.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*, vol. i. p. 40 note.

ment promptly refused to register the edict and even proposed to take measures against the once popular author of the *mémoire*. At the same time there appeared a pamphlet entitled *Lettre d'un bon Français*. In it Necker was taunted with having used France to make his fortune, with having used his fortune to gain office, and his office to alter the constitution and to shake the throne. The pamphlet was written, as Necker knew, by a personal enemy—a treasurer in the household of the Comte d'Artois—and he turned to the king for redress. Louis forbade the Parlement to take proceedings against the *mémoire* but the *Lettre d'un bon Français* was allowed to circulate, and Necker, notwithstanding his possession of “every qualification necessary to a minister of finance,” notwithstanding a policy which had filled the treasury and conferred benefits on the people, had now to discover that he was as powerless before the disapproval of the Parlement, the coldness of Maurepas, and the wavering support of the king as was ever Turgot with his schemes of radical reform.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE FALL OF NECKER AND CLOSE OF THE WAR.



DUC D'ORLÉANS.

MAUREPAS had indeed done his work. Men took up the *Compte rendu* again and read it with different eyes. Necker was now accused of disloyalty to the monarchy in permitting the nation to criticise the management of the trea-

sury, and with more reason was blamed for giving an incomplete and even a misleading statement of the accounts. The king grew fidgety and alarmed as pamphlet after pamphlet<sup>1</sup> appeared against the book whose publication he had sanc-

<sup>1</sup> See as a good example *Les Comment*, British Museum Collection—Finance. F.R. 460.

tioned. Necker, tenacious of the good opinion of his fellows, grew sensitive and miserable, and Madame Necker, who was a devoted wife, went to Maurepas, and prayed him to stop the current of literature which so disturbed her husband. Maurepas was polite, but did nothing, and repeated the incident as a very good joke.

Only the queen and her set, and the more liberal-minded of the clergy, stood by the abused minister. The queen had always liked Necker; he was friendly towards Choiseul and he shared her antipathy to Maurepas, and there was something in his unusual position which appealed to the generous side in Marie-Antoinette. She did her best to stand by him now, but Necker's position demanded some more tangible token of support than the sympathy of the queen or the approval of the archbishop of Paris, and he asked to be admitted to the king's council.<sup>1</sup> "As soon as you lay aside the doctrines of Calvin," Maurepas replied. It was an insulting answer, for Necker was a sincere Protestant, and it was exactly because he was a Protestant that his admission to the council would be valuable to him as a signal mark of favour.

And indeed, quite apart from the opposition of the moment, Necker's exclusion from the council was a heavy handicap. Not only was he unable to

<sup>1</sup> See Necker, *De l'administration des finances*, Intro. 59 seq.



defend his own measures at the council table, but he was also debarred from criticising the measures of his colleagues, or even from always knowing what those measures were. His first request refused, he next asked that as Controller-general of Finance he might be informed of and granted some control over the money transactions in the war and naval departments. The ministers of these departments, M. de Ségur and M. de Castries, both owed their appointment largely to his influence, and were ready to give the proposal their support; but again the request was refused, and on the 19th of May, 1781, Necker, nettled and disappointed, resigned.

It is said that when first presented at court M. Necker had walked up to the queen, had taken her hand and kissed it without its being presented to him, and that now, instead of writing his letter of resignation to the king on official paper with official heading, he used a little sheet that had no heading at all.<sup>1</sup> Marie-Antoinette had been amused, but Louis was offended. He had disliked the flood of pamphlets issued against his minister, he had disliked a minister who was at enmity with Maurepas, but the little sheet was still worse, and the step Necker had taken became irrevocable.

Necker himself hardly expected it would be so. "The boundless zeal with which I have devoted

<sup>1</sup> Soulavie, *Mémoires*, vol. iv. p. 217.

myself to serve the king"<sup>1</sup> could not, he thought, be easily dispensed with, or would at all events be again speedily in request, and the sensation caused by his resignation encouraged the belief. His enemies had had their day, it was now the turn of his friends, and these, if less powerful, were more numerous. The middle class, which Turgot had aimed at making more influential, was fast growing in importance, and it sympathised with Necker. It was indignant at his fall and was fearful of the consequences, for the war was not over and money must be had. The more thoughtful of the nobles, the men who wished and afterwards worked for reform were disappointed, and unless Madame Necker was misinformed, the queen spent a whole Saturday in weeping over the news.<sup>2</sup> That Marie-Antoinette wrote to her brother the Emperor, saying that Necker's fall was none of her doing and that she was heartily sorry for it, is certainly true.

There was some ground for this disclaimer. Necker retired to his country-house at Saint Ouen, half-way between Paris and Saint Denis, and there received the nobles, prelates, and others who drove to do him honour. Conspicuous among these were those princes of the blood—the Prince de Condé, the Duc d'Orléans, and the Duc de Chartres

<sup>1</sup> Droz, *Le règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> See D'Haussonville, *Le salon de Madame Necker*, Lettre de Mme. Necker à un curé de Paris.

—who were known to be the least friendly to the queen, while both in Paris and the provinces court intrigue, too readily identified with her and her society, was said to be the reason of his fall.

In reality Marie-Antoinette had done what she could to retain Necker, but in vain; the minister was proud and would not be persuaded, and the King, as she knew, was prejudiced. Indeed though her influence over her husband has been boasted by her biographers, Louis' jealousy of Austrian policy was ever present, and in political matters Marie-Antoinette seldom gained more from him than a pleased assent to what it cost him little to yield.

Necker did not return to office until seven years had passed. He tells us that in his retirement he one day looked over the projects he had planned for the good of France, and which his fall had prevented from becoming more than projects. There were schemes for the lightening of the *gabelle*, for the removal of the customs duties levied on goods passing from one province to another of France, for the extension of provincial assemblies—these he read and pondered until he could go no further, and pushing the now useless papers aside tears fell from his eyes.<sup>1</sup>

Had Necker effected any good result by his resignation one would have more sympathy with the

<sup>1</sup> Necker, *De l'administration des finances de la France*, Intro. p. 58.



tears. In office he did much good, if not great work; out of office he could only pose as a martyr leaving finance to inferior men, with disastrous result.

It is one of the ironies of history that the resignation of Necker was presently followed by two events which, had they occurred earlier, must have greatly strengthened his hands. On the 19th of October, 1781, occurred the victory at York Town, which so excited patriotic feeling in France that the loan he had found difficult to raise became easy to his successor, while a month later, on the 21st of November, Maurepas died. In 1780, Vergennes, Minister of Foreign Affairs, had written to the king that the scarcity of money rendered the situation alarming, and that a speedy peace was the only remedy. The victory of York Town, it is true, created a national enthusiasm which made money more abundant, but it also tended to prolong the war and to increase the financial difficulties of France. These were serious enough under an able minister—under an incompetent one they were disastrous. “The war” (with England) wrote Mercy to Kaunitz in January, 1781, “is nearly at an end from exhaustion, no decisive plan is adopted, there is no clear understanding among the ministers, the navy is disgusted, and ways and means become embarrassing.”<sup>1</sup> In

<sup>1</sup>Mercy, *Correspondance secrète entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*, vol. i. p. 19.



1780 the one hundred and twenty-six million francs allotted to the marine had been exhausted, and seventeen million more had been used, but the men had not been paid and all the services were in arrears.<sup>1</sup>

It was such things that had made Necker wish for some control over the management of the sums allotted to the *bureaux* of war and of the marine, and it was in the face of such things that Maurepas refused and triumphed over the "one minister who having opposed the war was yet capable of carrying it on."<sup>2</sup> His triumph did not last long; six months after Necker resigned Maurepas died "having," says Henri Martin, "done France all the harm he could." He had deprived her of Necker and of Turgot, and he had left as Minister of Finance, Joly de Fleury, an excellent relater of anecdotes but a totally incompetent minister. He was, however, a member of one of the great parliamentary families, and to conciliate these was a popular act, the last to which Maurepas sacrificed his country.

From the date of Necker's resignation events hurried one after another towards the state of things which finally obliged the king to summon the States-General. This did not happen until

<sup>1</sup> Henri Martin, *Histoire de France*, vol. 16, p. 450.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. 16, p. 466.

1788, but the history of the years that intervened is a story of loss for Versailles and of gain for the new power which was to arise and destroy it.

M. de Fleury's ministry only lasted twenty-two months, "but in that short time," says Droz, "began the falling to pieces of a government whose incapacity seemed to increase with its danger."<sup>1</sup> The chief danger arose from the state of the finances; but perhaps it is not too much to say that almost as great a danger arose from the instability of the king. Ministers had learned that they could not depend upon his support. He entered on schemes of reform with delight, and then forsook the reforming minister at the critical moment. It was not disloyalty of soul, it was a fault of brain rather than of heart. Schemes for the good of the people he welcomed, but the endurance which meets the difficulties such schemes involve and vanquishes them one by one, he did not possess. "Be not weary in well-doing" Louis translated into "Be not weary in well-wishing," and believed himself a benefactor of mankind.

Gradually the hopes raised at his accession faded. Mercy, writing to the Austrian minister in 1784, deplores the little influence which the king exercised in state affairs. "He brings to their consideration

<sup>1</sup> Droz, *Le règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 393.

too little information and no will of his own.”<sup>1</sup> For Louis had no initiative ; he listened to the proposals of his ministers, while abler sovereigns made proposals of their own. “It is only M. Turgot and I who care for the people,” he had once said ; and while Turgot planned his grand scheme of reform the king proposed a law which should protect farmers from the destruction of their crops by rabbits. And not only was he without initiative, but he found difficulty in mastering the papers which his ministers brought—a difficulty which helps to explain his dislike of a clever minister, for while Louis dreaded the domination of a powerful mind he also shrank from the labour such a mind imposed on its sovereign.

Such a trait is fatal in the character of a king, and was never more disastrous than at this particular moment in the history of France. To re-establish the finances on a satisfactory basis reform was a necessity, and only a strong minister could hope to effect reform.

M. de Fleury was not a strong minister, nor had he sympathy with reform ; he resented any shade of popular control, and aimed at maintaining that strict centralisation of affairs in the Crown against which Turgot, and in less degree Necker also, had

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*, vol. i. p. 315.



contended. The policy of this new minister was, like that of Turgot's immediate successor, one of reaction, and indeed an order went forth from the Council only three days after the fall of Necker which was significant of reaction in other departments as well as in that of finance.

By it military rank was made impossible to any soldier who had not four generations of nobility, or was not a son of a Chevalier de Saint Louis.<sup>1</sup> Nobility had always been a condition of military rank in the French army, but the ministers of war had not been punctilious in exacting its proof, and it had been sufficient that an officer had the means and education of a noble. The new decree was issued at an unfortunate moment, for France was then full of enthusiasm for American institutions, and fighting to maintain there what she took trouble to deny her own citizens. It was a time when a fashion of equality was pervading the capital, when the nobles were giving up distinctions of dress and behaviour and mingling with the rich *bourgeois* on equal terms—when the middle class, in fact, was beginning to realise its power—and it was just then that Versailles chose to impress upon the *bourgeois* that they, no more than the peasantry, might attain to the military glory dearer to a Frenchman than land or money.

<sup>1</sup> See (on this *règlement*) Chérest, *La chute de l'ancien régime*, vol. i. p. 14.



There followed the revival of offices which Necker had suppressed, and of the privileges attached to these. Now, Necker in his *Compte rendu* had revealed the burden imposed on taxation by the long list of pensions charged on the royal treasury. It was a charge which the *bourgeois* particularly resented, and their restiveness under it was increased by the military ordinance which now shut out their own sons from the chance of partaking of its benefits. Nor was Fleury's attitude towards the provincial assemblies less re-actionary. The two assemblies which already existed he left undisturbed, but he so modified the scheme for a third which had been sent to the Parlement of Paris for registration as to render it quite ineffective, and he took care that no others were proposed during his administration. And to all this Louis gave his consent.

The country was less docile. When Necker resigned office he declared that he had left a surplus of ten million francs ;<sup>1</sup> Fleury, on the other hand, declared that he found himself with insufficient funds to carry on the government, and to remedy this continued Necker's system of borrowing. But victories did not occur every day and loans were difficult to raise, and the Minister resorted to the old plan of increased and vexatious taxation. A

<sup>1</sup> Necker, *Compte rendu*. *Première partie; État des Finances*.

number of small taxes were first imposed, and then in August, 1782, because the war expenses were so heavy, a third *vingtième* was added which was to last for four years.

To the registration of these taxes the Parlement of Paris consented, but several of the provincial parlements rebelled. The Parlement of Besançon for example, agreed to pay the *vingtième* so long as the war lasted but no longer, and when letters were sent from Versailles commanding immediate and unconditional surrender, they complained that the letters sent had been issued by a minister and not by the king himself. At the same time the *État* of Brittany remonstrated against an order of the new minister which refused them certain ancient rights, and to both Besançon and Brittany the Crown replied by a mere assertion of prerogative.

"All that is done in my name is done by my orders," was the answer to Besançon; while the grievance of the Bretons "was not contrary to the privileges graciously bestowed by my predecessors on the province of Brittany,"—a people, on the one hand, at the mercy of an unscrupulous minister, and, on the other, bound down by conditions made by the kings "my predecessors!"

The answers were not such as France was willing to endure. The Parlement of Besançon drew up a list of abuses, suggested the States-General, and

proposed that the document should be sent to the princes, peers, and parlements of the kingdom, inviting their co-operation in opening the king's eyes to the dangers to which his ministers exposed him. But for such a measure the country was not yet ready, and the proposal was not carried out. The Bretons appealed directly to the king. "We see our franchise and our liberties—the essential conditions of the solemn contract which gave you Brittany—treated as simple privileges, founded on a mere concession. Father of your people, you exercise no authority but that of the laws. They reign by you, and you by them. The conditions which secure you our obedience are an essential part of the law of your kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

To such an appeal Louis had nothing to reply. He could sacrifice his own personal privileges, but not what he considered the prerogative of the Crown. This he regarded as a divine right to be used, when possible, for the relief of the people, but to be watched and warded even at their expense. He grieved over the taxation imposed, but he had nothing better to suggest.

Meantime the war continued and money difficulties increased. The defeat of de Grasse in April, 1782, did not chill the national enthusiasm; patriotic gifts, as we have seen, were willingly contributed,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Droz, *Le règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 389.



but patriotic gifts were not enough. Vergennes, now the most influential of the king's ministers, was impatient for peace; the king himself had never liked the war, and England, after her victory, was in a position to enter on treaty negotiations. These were begun in September, 1782, but it was not until a year later—September, 1783—that the treaty was signed which closed the war. By it England yielded to France the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon near Newfoundland; the river Sénégal, its dependencies, and several forts on the coast of Africa; and in India some territory in Pondicherry and Karical. She also restored the island of St. Lucie in the West Indies, and ceded that of Tobago, while she abrogated the articles in the treaty of Utrecht relating to the destruction of Dunkerque, which had been so galling to France. On the other hand, France conceded to England the West Indian Islands of Granada, St. Vincent, St. Kit's, Nevis, Dominica, and Montserrat.

Many were dissatisfied with the conditions of the peace. Men felt that the France who had held her own with credit throughout the war, and had successfully maintained the cause of America, might have obtained still better terms; but the France whose expenses were a "fathomless abyss" dared not press for them.

The war had raised the prestige of France among



the nations, but it had very materially increased the financial difficulties, which more than anything else brought about the French Revolution, and it had deepened the unrest which gave those difficulties their significance. The heroes of the American War, and even the common soldiers, talked much of American institutions, and they talked as if these were heaven-sent, without a flaw. "The subjects of an old monarchy," as has been well said, "are liable to strange mistakes when they wish to adopt the democratic laws of a people like the Americans"; and this truth was forgotten in the years to come.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE QUEEN AND THE COUNTRY.



JOSEPH II.

THE war with England was over, and the men who had been conspicuous in its conduct returned to France, and were received with every honour. Never was Marie-Antoinette more heart and soul French than in the matter of this war. She

threw herself into it from the first with an ardour that had alarmed her brother; she followed its details with keen interest; she was even willing to forego certain definite pleasures in order to forward it, and was eager to receive and do honour to its heroes. It might have been thought that, even if disapproved of by the older and graver nobility, such conduct must have rendered her popular in Paris. But it

was not so, and to understand fully why her enthusiasm for the glory of French arms profited her so little, we must go back some years.

When Joseph II. visited Versailles in the spring of 1777, both he and Louis had been surprised to discover how much they found in one another to like and approve. But the personal feeling did not in the least affect Louis' prejudice against Austrian policy or enable Joseph to find out how far, in certain contingencies, France would fulfil her obligations as his ally. The Emperor was an ambitious ruler. He had brought about the dismemberment of Poland and had schemes for that of Turkey, and he much coveted a certain part of Bavaria, which would connect Bohemia with his southern provinces. On all such proceedings France looked with a jealous eye.

The ruler of Bavaria was Maximilian, and in the summer of 1777 his death seemed near at hand. He had no direct heir, but he had three or four distant relatives. Of these Charles-Theodore, Elector Palatine, a feeble-hearted and most pacific prince, was one, and with him Joseph opened negotiations. He revived certain Austrian claims on Bavaria, but agreed to waive these if Charles-Theodore would grant him the land he coveted. The negotiations were far advanced when, in December, Maximilian died. Joseph at once hastened matters; in less

than a fortnight the treaty was signed, twelve thousand Austrian troops guarded the new territory, and Joseph, writing to his brother Léopold, congratulated himself on his *coup d'état*.

There were, however, the co-heirs to reckon with, and they were less content. Their rights had been entirely disregarded, and they turned for redress to Prussia. Joseph turned to France, but the answer she gave was disappointing. "The French," says the Emperor, "have refused to regard the aggrandisement of Austria as included in the obligations of the Versailles Treaties, and will not hear of sending their stipulated assistance."<sup>1</sup>

It was natural that both Joseph and Maria-Theresa should appeal to Marie-Antoinette, and as natural that she should appeal to her husband. His answer was significant: "It was," he said, "the ambition of her own family that endangered the French alliance. They had begun with Poland, and now had attacked Bavaria, and France had sent despatches signifying her disapproval to all her ambassadors."<sup>2</sup>

There followed despairing letters from Vienna. Maria-Theresa was miserable; she questioned the Austrian claim on Bavaria; she disapproved of her son's policy; she feared war with Frederick, her old enemy, and a broken alliance with France. Her one

<sup>1</sup> J. Frank Bright, *Joseph II.*, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. p. 169.



hope was in her daughter, for if only France could be persuaded to show herself friendly war might yet be averted.

Marie-Antoinette was roused; she spoke to Maurepas and to Vergennes, and urged on them the claims of the Austrian alliance. Vergennes replied that the financial difficulties of France prevented her from rendering Austria material aid.<sup>1</sup> The answer was true, but its spirit was equivocating, and the queen knew it. It was not material aid for which Maria-Theresa craved, but some sign from France of moral support in the quarrel.

The sign was not given, and in July, 1778, despite the efforts of mother and daughter, the dreaded war broke out. In August Maria-Theresa wrote again: "I ask nothing of the king which will involve him in this war, only a manifestation of friendliness—the naming of some regiments and generals who would come to our aid should Hanover interfere."<sup>2</sup> Marie-Antoinette did what she could, but the regiments were not named.

By October there was a question of mediation, and France was applied to in the hope that she would act in the interests of Austria. Once more Marie-Antoinette pled her mother's cause, but she pled with little success, and Joseph, ceasing to regard

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. pp. 186 and 188 note.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. iii. p. 234.

France as a trustworthy ally, turned to Russia, with whom he had long been in friendly relations. Together Russia and France arranged a treaty of peace which was signed in May, 1779. The Emperor gained a small strip of land, by no means worth the quarrel, while the alliance, which had been the pride of his mother's heart, was shaken, and his sister's reputation as queen of France received a blow from which it never quite recovered. The sympathy with Austria she had so openly expressed was added to her other sins, and from this time forward each deed of Austrian aggressiveness reacted on the queen.

About the same time that Marie-Antoinette rendered herself unpopular by her attitude towards the Bavarian war, an incident occurred in the war with England which added fuel to a fire already smouldering. For years there had been, as we know, a certain jealousy on the part of the Duc d'Orléans towards Versailles. This was increased by the quarrel between Louis XV. and the Parlement of Paris.<sup>1</sup> The Duc d'Orléans then posed as the friend of liberty and of the people; an attitude which the family continued to assume with some profit to itself and much detriment to Versailles.

The Duc de Chartres, eldest son of Orléans, had hitherto been friendly with Versailles. He was the

<sup>1</sup>See p. 122.



MARIE-ANTOINETTE.

PAINTED BY MADAME VIGÉE LE BRUN.

*From Galeries historiques de Versailles.*





companion of Artois and a constant frequenter of the society of the queen, who had secured for him at least one lucrative appointment. When war with England was declared, Chartres sailed with the French fleet as commander of a squadron. In 1778 news came that the fleet in which he commanded a squadron had encountered the English and that the English had retreated before the French. Paris was thrown into a fever of delight. There were demonstrations at the Opera, and for three nights the inhabitants of the houses surrounding the Palais-Royal lit up their windows in honour of the Duc de Chartres.

A few days later came the admiral's account, in which he said that but for the inattention of the Duc de Chartres to the orders signalled from his (the admiral's) ship the English could not have escaped, but must have suffered a severe defeat. A reaction of feeling followed, and it was in vain that M. de La Motte-Piquet, an experienced officer, who acted as adviser to the Duc de Chartres, explained that the misfortune had not arisen from carelessness but from a new system of signalling difficult to read.

Chartres was severely blamed, and the Comte d'Artois begged the queen to interfere on his behalf. Marie-Antoinette did so, but was not more fortunate in this case than in that of Austria. She neither

satisfied the duke nor pleased the public.<sup>1</sup> He left the navy, and at his own desire was made Colonel-general of the hussars; but he chose to believe that the queen could have done better for him had she cared, and he became her open enemy. Henceforth the Palais-Royal was more than ever the resort of those who were discontented with Versailles.

The private conduct of the queen—her favouritism, recklessness and disregard of etiquette had already offended France. Her action in regard to Bavaria deepened that offence, and though blameless in the matter of the Duc de Chartres, she thereby incurred the resentment of a faction which was to become ever more dangerous to herself and to Versailles.

But by-and-bye a hope of better things grew strong in the hearts of Mercy and of Maria-Theresa, for in December, 1778, an heir was looked for.

The Prince de Ligne, writing of Marie-Antoinette when at her gayest, says: "I never saw her happy for one whole day." Marie-Antoinette's deepest lack was her own want of resource, but she believed it to be her childlessness. She had always loved children; she encouraged those of her *femme de chambre*, Madame de Misery, to play in her rooms

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. p. 264.

when Dauphiness, and when queen adopted a little peasant boy.<sup>1</sup>

But besides this love of children there was the fact that the Comte d'Artois had two sons while the king had none, and the knowledge that unless she became mother of an heir her importance must decrease. Already in the very corridors of Versailles she had been taunted with her childlessness. The *poissardes*<sup>2</sup> or market-women of Paris had certain rights regarding royalty, and in black silk dresses and diamond ornaments were present in the palace on the occasion of the birth of the little Duc d'Angoulême, on the 12th of August, 1775, eldest child of the Comte d'Artois. The queen had been with her sister-in-law. "Wherever kindness of heart is called for," wrote Mercy, "the queen is admirable. The public is touched by this last expression of it."<sup>3</sup> Mercy's public was gener-

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, vol. ii. p. 478. It was not a very happy venture. The child grew up a coward, and in 1792, afraid lest the story of the queen's patronage might endanger his safety, became a revolutionist of a very pronounced type.

<sup>2</sup> Under the old regime the women of *la halle*, the central market in Paris, had certain recognised privileges. On the occasion of a royal birth or marriage, of a great victory, and on New Year's Day, they were entitled to go to Versailles, and kneeling, congratulate the king. On such occasions they were afterwards entertained to dinner in the *Grand Commun*, where one of the first gentlemen of the *Bouche* received them. They had also the right of occupying the royal *loge* when the theatres gave gratuitous performances, a right shared by the charcoal-burners.

<sup>3</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol ii. p. 370.



ally a select one. Another public that did not mince matters followed her as she passed from the countess's rooms to her own,<sup>1</sup> and what the *poissardes* said their comrades in Paris thought. Little wonder if later in the day Marie-Antoinette wrote, "It is needless to tell my dear mother how hard it is for me to welcome an heir who is not my child."<sup>2</sup>

And now at length an heir was looked for! In the cathedrals and churches throughout the kingdom the priests prayed and the people came and went adding their petition. The Holy Sacrament was exposed in the churches of the capital, and at Vienna too they prayed for the coming of an heir.<sup>3</sup>

Men and women left their houses at Paris and hired rooms at Versailles to be ready to welcome the Dauphin. In the palace the galleries were crowded. The *grand cabinet* was filled by secretaries of state, officers of the king's and queen's households and those having the right of *grandes entrées*. Down below a horse stood saddled, and the Prince de Lambesc, brother of Madame de Lamballe, was ready to mount and ride to Vienna with the glad news.<sup>4</sup>

Could the baby-girl<sup>5</sup> that opened sad little

<sup>1</sup> Madam Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. ii. p. 366.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, vol. iii. p. 270.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, vol. iii. p. 277.

<sup>5</sup> Marie-Thérèse-Charlotte, Madame Royale.



eyes on the strange world of Versailles on December 20th, 1778, have known what hopes she had disappointed she must have closed them again under a very weight of mortification. The child was born amid wild confusion, for etiquette considered the queen's child the property of France, and all might enter the chamber and assure themselves of its presence. The crowd, the confusion, and the silence of the infant alarmed the queen, and she lost consciousness. The physicians were prompt, and in a few moments the danger was over, but the fact that there had been danger was fortunate for Marie-Antoinette; it diverted the public mind from its disappointment in a princess. "There would have been great dismay," wrote Madame du Deffand, "had not the alarm caused by the queen's danger been the prevailing feeling."<sup>1</sup>

The queen herself was not greatly concerned. She hoped an heir might follow, and meantime rejoiced in her child, and desired to enter Paris in state to return public thanks for the gift—a ceremony not generally observed except on the birth of a Dauphin. The king, who was as pleased as she, approved, and the entry took place on the 8th of February, 1779.

Perhaps Marie-Antoinette had never felt herself of such importance to France as when she entered

<sup>1</sup>Du Deffand, *Correspondance complète*, vol.ii. p. 672. Letter to Walpole.

Paris as the mother of a princess. She had never received so cold a reception. From Notre-Dame the royal cortège crossed the Seine and made its way to Saint Geneviève. It passed through streets the queen had not seen before and among people who had not seen her—the great working quarters of the capital—and here in many places she encountered silence.<sup>1</sup> The people were hungry, the war was expensive, and the queen was extravagant, why should they shout her praise because heaven had blessed her with a daughter and burdened France with a princess?

Unfortunately the responsibilities of motherhood did not at first effect much change in Marie-Antoinette. In the spring of 1779 she took measles, and to amuse herself did the very silliest thing in all her reign. She was not ill, and disliking the irksomeness of confinement she requested the king to allow four gentlemen of her society to sit in her room and entertain her. These were the Ducs de Coigny and de Guines—he whose cause had already brought her disfavour<sup>2</sup>—the Comte d'Esterhazy and the Baron de Besenval. They went to her room in the morning and remained until eleven at night, leaving only for meals. The Comte d'Artois went also, and, for propriety's sake,

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. p. 296.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 186.

Madame and the Princesse de Lamballe; but the ladies were somewhat *de trop*, and were not as constant in their charge as they might have been. The king had not had measles and so could not be admitted. "Thank heaven," wrote Mercy, "this vexatious time is over, and less harm come of it than might have been expected."<sup>1</sup> Harm enough had been done, for Paris had heard of the freak and had commented on it severely.

To save expense because the country was at war, the court this year gave up its annual visit to Fontainebleau.<sup>2</sup> The decision gave satisfaction in the capital, but the satisfaction was short-lived, since to make up, Marie-Antoinette began her famous private theatricals in the theatre of the Little Trianon.<sup>3</sup> The Little Trianon had never been popular in Paris. In the minds of the citizens it was associated with extravagance, exclusiveness, and a defiance of the old laws which regulated a French court. When the Parisians heard of their queen herself appearing on the stage of her own theatre, they talked as if she were lost to self-respect as well as to the respect of her subjects.

Nor were the theatricals popular at Versailles. The actors were chosen from the queen's intimates, and the audience was at first strictly confined to the members of the royal family. The court was jealous

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. p. 307.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. iii. p. 358.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, vol. iii. p. 456.



and critical, and the Princesse de Lamballe, in arms for her prerogative as Superintendent of the queen's household resented her exclusion ; while the ladies of the palace complained that as the queen spent most of her time at the Little Trianon there was nothing left for them to do, except to appear on Sundays or on fête days at toilet or at mass.<sup>1</sup> It is of this period that we have the story of Louis XVI. walking on the leads of his deserted palace and scanning with a telescope the great Avenue de Paris, to see whether by chance there might still be any carriage on dutiful way to Versailles.

At length on the 22nd of October, 1781, a glad event occurred. The heir<sup>2</sup> so ardently longed for was born and hearty cries of "Vive la Reine" once more rose in the capital. They came too late to rejoice the heart of the Empress, for on the 29th of November, 1780, she had died, bravely and nobly as she had lived. "I am afraid of going to sleep, I do not wish to be surprised, I would rather see death come,"<sup>3</sup> she said in the old spirit that had faced the dangers of her youth.

In her Marie-Antoinette lost a wise and loving if also an interested adviser. But with the firm faith preserved by Maria-Theresa in the benefits to both

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. p. 465.

<sup>2</sup> Louis-Joseph-François-Xavier, d. 1789.

<sup>3</sup> J. Franck Bright, *Joseph II.*



countries of the Franco-Austrian alliance, it was difficult for her to see that her daughter could be injured by trying to urge its importance, nor was Mercy the man to open the empress' eyes. In all matters respecting the queen's personal conduct her mother saw clearly; the last letter of advice was characteristic, and echoed the warning sent six years before. "Change nothing," Maria-Theresa then said, and she repeated it now. The queen had proposed to bring up her little daughter simply, and to remove from her all indications of her rank. "I do not approve," wrote Maria-Theresa; ". . . without encouraging their pride, the children of a sovereign must be accustomed to state from their infancy, so that they may escape the ills which arise when a sovereign and his family are not distinguished from others. It is an essential point, especially in France, in the midst of a nation *aussi vive que légère*." <sup>1</sup>

For some time after her mother's death we hear less of the queen's frivolity, and her brother Joseph, who visited her again in 1781, noted a marked improvement in her conduct. But the old habits were there and could not easily be thrown off. "This unfortunate dread of being bored," wrote the Emperor in 1782, "is a very real evil; all the more so that the habit of trifling is a habit of the time and of all her

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète*, vol. iii. p. 283.

surroundings.”<sup>1</sup> But the queen had made her surroundings, and had now to suffer their consequences.

In October, 1781, the Comte d’Artois was known to be in debt to the extent of twenty-one million francs,<sup>2</sup> and in September of the following year M. de Guéménée, whose wife held the post of governess to the royal children, failed for thirty-three millions. Thousands of families are said to have suffered by this failure, and indignation was great. M. de Guéménée was forbidden to appear at court, or his wife to retain her governess-ship,<sup>3</sup> and Paris muttered that such was the queen’s society.

While the public blamed the queen for having such friends, courtiers blamed her for not keeping them. But the king was inexorable, the Guéménées went, and the queen found that she had fresh enemies at the Palais-Royal. Madame de Coigny, one of the most brilliant of the famous women of the day, resented the disgrace of her friends, and held the queen responsible for the king’s action. She deserted Versailles and frequented the Palais-Royal, where she threw herself into the Orleanist faction, pretended contempt for the court and affection for the *bourgeoisie*, and with her clever, biting tongue set herself against the queen. With

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*. Joseph II. à Mercy, 18th February, 1782.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. i. p. 66, Oct., 1781.

<sup>3</sup> Nolhac, *La reine Marie-Antoinette*, p. 33.

her went the Duc de Lauzun, once the queen's admirer, but now—because of a rebuff he had received—her unsparing enemy.<sup>1</sup>

Nor was this all. Marie-Antoinette had had nothing to do with the appointment of Madame de Guéménée, who inherited the post from her aunt, Madame de Marsan. But the choice of the new governess was left largely with the queen, and it fell on Madame de Polignac. The queen was at times a little tired of this lady, and would, we are told, have preferred as the governess of her children Madame de Duras, her *dame d'atours*, a lady whose conduct was an example of every excellence.<sup>2</sup> But the trammels of favouritism compelled her. Madame de Polignac was the queen's friend and the courtiers expected her appointment; the public expected it too, but in very different mood, and received the news with angry murmurs. Was the heir for whom France had waited so long to be educated by the Polignac? Popular prejudice was strong against both queen and court.

It was just about this time that Beaumarchais' famous play, the *Mariage de Figaro*, became the talk of Paris, which welcomed with delight its exposure of the inconsistencies of the old regime. The play was completed in 1781, but its boldness and laxity

<sup>1</sup> See Maugras, *Duc de Lauzun et la cour de Marie-Antoinette*.

<sup>2</sup> Nolhac, *La reine Marie-Antoinette*, p. 34.



of morals prevented its representation. The censor and the king alike condemned it. "It is detestable," said Louis, "and shall never be acted."<sup>1</sup> This man makes light of everything which ought to be respected in a government," and at once curiosity was aroused. But Beaumarchais was meek; he covered the wicked thing with card-board, tied it with rose-coloured ribbons, and printed on the offensive boards, "Opusculé Comique," and laid it in a drawer. He only took it from that drawer on strong persuasion—that of an archbishop, a prince, or a count—and, when he had finished reading, replaced it, saying that in that drawer it must remain.<sup>2</sup> "And yet," writes Madame Campan, "there is hardly a day that I do not hear someone say, 'I have heard,' or 'I am going to hear Beaumarchais' play to-day.'"<sup>3</sup>

Beaumarchais waited two years and then tried again. He considered himself an important personage, for ministers had been glad of his aid before now, and he felt aggrieved. This time the officials concerned gave permission, special arrangements were made, tickets distributed to the court, and the very carriages were thronging the entrance to the theatre when an express arrived from the king forbidding the play.<sup>4</sup> And now to curiosity and interest in

<sup>1</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 278.

<sup>2</sup> Loménie, *Beaumarchais et son temps*, vol. ii. p. 295 *seq.*

<sup>3</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 278.

<sup>4</sup> Loménie, *Beaumarchais et son temps*, vol. ii. p. 306.



the piece was added anger against the king; murmurs of "oppression and of tyranny."

Six months later, on condition of some slight modifications, the king yielded, and on the 27th of April, 1784, began the enormous success of this revolutionary play. The theatre was besieged by early morning, its gates broken and its doors knocked in, ladies of high rank dined in actresses' rooms in order to secure their places<sup>1</sup>—society of all classes rushed to applaud the "derision of everything which ought to be revered."

There was enough at which to cavil, and yet neither king nor queen took warning. In November, 1784, the king bought the palace of Saint Cloud from the Duc d'Orléans and gave it to the queen to possess and to bequeath. The price was six million francs, and this was covered by the sale of other properties, but the public heard of the purchase and not of the sales; it heard the purchase was for the Austrian, and saw orders regarding Saint Cloud issued in her name and it murmured. It was no secret that the Minister of Finance was struggling with a deficit, and yet the king could lavish gifts upon the queen; the winters were cold and hard and miserable for the poor, and yet the Polignacs, the queen's favourites, received gift after gift. If the treasury were low, whose was the fault? surely in large part of the

<sup>1</sup> Loménie, *Beaumarchais et son temps*, vol. ii. p. 324.

queen, of *Madame Déficit*, as the pamphleteers now began to call her.

And once more the feeling against Marie-Antoinette had been aggravated by Austrian politics. Joseph II. had quarrelled with Holland, and again considered France bound, as Austria's ally, to support him in the quarrel. Neither Louis nor his ministers were eager in his cause. "The French," Joseph himself wrote, "will never cease to consider any advantage which the Austrian monarchy may gain as a substantial loss to France."<sup>1</sup>

As usual appeal was made to the queen, and "for eighteen months," says one of her ablest biographers, "Marie-Antoinette maintained the interests of Austria with singular passion."<sup>2</sup> The whole tradition of France was in favour of Holland. "Are we to abandon to the imperial yoke a republican ally to please an Austrian queen?" the Parisians asked one another as they sat in their clubs, or in the cafés round the garden of the Palais-Royal.<sup>3</sup> But the queen persevered. She pursued the king, schemed against ministers, and once at least delayed a courier in the hope that a conciliatory letter might arrive

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*, vol. i. p. 263, Joseph II. à Mercy, 13 mai, 1784.

<sup>2</sup> Nollac, *La reine Marie-Antoinette*, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Mémoires, ou Souvenirs et Anecdotes du comte de Ségur*, vol. ii. p. 83 seq.

from her brother before a disquieting French dispatch was sent off.<sup>1</sup>

In the end war between Austria and Holland was prevented by the payment of ten million francs to Austria. Of this sum Holland would only pay five and a half million, and France, in consideration of certain advantages, paid the rest. Again the public mind dwelt on the money spent and not on the compensation, and again it blamed the queen. She was charged with the loss of the four and a half millions, and also with that of untold sums which passed secretly by her hands from the exchequer of her husband to that of her brother. The charge was entirely unfounded, but it added point to the new epithet—the *Madame Déficit* by which Paris taunted her.

These things happened in the years 1784 and 1785, and while they were going on a plot was gathering round Marie-Antoinette which was to deal a fatal blow to her fair fame.

<sup>1</sup> La Rocheterie, *Recueil de lettres authentiques de Marie-Antoinette*, vol. ii. p. 51 note.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE DIAMOND NECKLACE.



PRINCE LOUIS DE ROHAN.

THE story of the diamond necklace is so curious as to be in itself of lasting interest, but it is important in history, only, as it indicates the attitude of the aristocracy towards the Crown and the place to which the queen had fallen

in popular esteem. It is one in which the queen was blameless, but which yet would have been impossible but for the imprudence and extravagance she had shown. In this story were three principal actors—a Cardinal, an adventuress, and a tradesman—no one of whom plotted with the distinct desire of injuring Marie-Antoinette, but all



of whom used their knowledge of her imprudences to serve their own ends.

Most conspicuous of the three was the Cardinal, the Prince Louis de Rohan-Soubise, a member of one of the oldest, proudest, and most ambitious families in France. He was a nephew of Madame de Marsan and a cousin of the Princesse de Guéménée, and, although himself very far from devout, had had the support of the Devout party, with Madame de Marsan at its head, all through his career. By her influence he had been sent as ambassador to Vienna, where, because of his insolence and dissipation, he had incurred the displeasure of Maria-Theresa. By the same influence he had succeeded M. de la Roche-Aymon as Grand Almoner of France—the highest honour possible to a French ecclesiastic ; but Rohan wished for yet another ; he wished to find himself a Minister of Louis XVI.

Unfortunately for his ambition, certain disrespectful remarks which he had made regarding Maria-Theresa had excited the resentment of the queen ; he was received coldly at court, where, as Grand Almoner, he was often obliged to be present, and where his very attempts to overcome the queen's aversion only served to increase it. His pride was piqued and his anxiety aroused, for Marie-Antoinette's influence was strong with the king where it did not touch a pet prejudice or a cherished principle ; and Rohan

knew that he must renounce his ambition or move the queen. He wrote her letters, but they lay unopened ; he asked for audiences, and they were refused ; he even obtruded himself on her presence at fêtes to which he had not been invited. "The queen," writes M. de la Rocheterie, "was not only inflexible—she was inaccessible."<sup>1</sup> There was an insolence in his behaviour she could not forgive, and Rohan at fifty saw himself as far as ever from his desire. At length in 1784 the Cardinal believed his opportunity had come.

A few years previously there had been brought to his notice a certain Madame de la Motte, a needy and engaging scion of royalty. She was descended from an illegitimate son of Henry II., and on the strength of her descent had received a pension from the Crown. Her husband, the Comte de la Motte, was neither rich nor very reputable. He was an officer in the Gendarmerie—not a lucrative post ; her pension was small ; they were both self-indulgent, and she had been brought up in an atmosphere of charity. On charity in one form or another they resolved to live. The countess had her royal descent—a charm greater than that of mere beauty—and a quick wit with which to use it ; the count had wits also, and to both, scruples were unknown.

It was as a subject for charity that she had been

<sup>1</sup> La Rocheterie, *Histoire de Marie-Antoinette*, vol. i. p. 497.

presented to the Cardinal, and as such her story lent her a certain interest, but her "bewitching smile," her gentle manners, and quick repartee lent her a greater, and henceforth the fortunes of the La Mottes improved.

But Madame de la Motte, like the Cardinal, was ambitious, and, like him, aimed at nothing less than the favour of the queen. She left her poor lodging in the Rue de la Verrerie, in Paris, and took furnished rooms in the Place Dauphine, at Versailles, where her husband had succeeded in obtaining an appointment as supernumerary in the bodyguard of the Comte d'Artois.<sup>1</sup> There she succeeded in getting so near royalty as an outer room in the apartments of Madame de Provence, after which, if Marie-Antoinette would only notice her, her fortune was secure! But Marie-Antoinette would have nothing to do with her. Once in February, 1783, Madame de la Motte approached near enough the queen to present to her a petition, but the queen passed on and paid no attention to the petitioner. The countess was disappointed, but by no means daunted. She had discovered M. de Rohan's ardent desire for the queen's favour, and this knowledge she added to her stock-in-trade. With magnificent effrontery she pretended to the Cardinal that

<sup>1</sup> See Beugnot, *Mémoires*, vol. i. for account of Madame de la Motte's proceedings.



she knew the queen ; she wrote to him of secret visits which Marie-Antoinette was in the habit of paying her, and in which the queen sometimes entrusted the countess with delicate missions ; she showed him letters which she declared had been written to her by Maria-Theresa's daughter.

Alas ! the queen had given too easy access to inferiors, and Rohan believed the tale. Madame de la Motte's scheme was working well. She held out hopes of restoring the Cardinal to favour, reported that the queen was softening towards him, that she was even willing to receive a written apology for his past conduct. This the Cardinal wrote out in careful and elaborate fashion, and confided to the care of Madame de la Motte.

The reply which he received was all he could have wished for. The queen, said the document, rejoiced to find him less at fault than she had believed him, and promised him an audience when circumstances allowed ; meantime she counselled discretion. The letter was written on small blue paper with gilt edges, and was the first of several to which the Cardinal replied with effusive gratitude ; but though the correspondence continued, no audience was proposed. Rohan grew impatient, and M. and Madame de la Motte hit upon a scheme which the queen's known disregard of etiquette alone made possible, and of which the Cardinal's own



character rendered him the dupe. He was too dissolute a man to be careful of the dignity of any woman, and too self-interested to guard that of his sovereign, and he believed Madame de la Motte when she told him that Marie-Antoinette would condescend to a secret audience in the garden of Versailles.

There, between eleven and twelve o'clock, on a July night in 1784, Rohan waited for the long-expected interview. A figure dressed in a simple white gown and large hat, such as the queen then loved to wear, advanced to him from a shady walk, and a rose was placed in his hand with the words: "You know what this signifies." As the words were spoken, someone whispered that Madame and the Comtesse d'Artois were coming that way. At this whisper the figure darted behind a tree, and the Cardinal retired believing that the queen had pardoned him—that the haughty daughter of the Hapsburgs had granted an interview which obliged her to hide behind a bush! He little thought that he had bent his princely head before a girl of no character and no birth whom M. de la Motte had picked up in the gardens of the Palais-Royal, seeing in her some resemblance to the queen.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See for the whole story of the diamond necklace, Campardon, *Procès du Collier*: also, La Rocheterie, *Histoire de Marie-Antoinette*, where an excellent account is given.

The Cardinal left Versailles satisfied, and presently paid dearly for his satisfaction. The countess reported the queen as interested in a charitable object for which she had not money convenient, and as a mark of her favour requested the Cardinal to advance her sixty thousand francs. The queen was in charitable mood just then. The sixty thousand were followed by a hundred thousand, and the Cardinal paid cheerfully. Meantime the La Motte presented fewer petitions and lived almost in affluence. The change of fortune she attributed to royal favour, and began to gain credit as one whose influence might be resorted to were a favour wanted from Marie-Antoinette.

And now appears the third personage, the tradesman Bœhmer, with Bassange his partner, jewellers to the queen. These men had in their possession a diamond necklace of rare beauty and value. They had collected the stones with great care and set them with great taste, but they had not found a purchaser. Knowing the queen's love of diamonds they had offered the necklace to the king, hoping he would buy it. He was tempted by its beauty, and showed it to the queen, remarking as he did so, "Its price would furnish two ships of war." "We have more need of vessels than of a jewel," said Marie-Antoinette, and the trinket was returned.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 4.

This incident occurred in 1778, just when the war with England had begun, and now in 1784 the necklace was still unsold. During the interval Bœhmer had himself gone to the queen and had threatened to drown himself if she still refused the purchase. But Marie-Antoinette was firm. "I have already refused it. I wish to hear no more of it; instead of drowning yourself take it to pieces and sell the stones."<sup>1</sup> Bœhmer did neither. He waited, and hearing of Madame de la Motte's interest with the queen, obtained an introduction to her and resolved by her aid to try once more whether Marie-Antoinette could not be moved.

Here, then, were the elements of the plot. A queen known to be extravagant and not always quite open with her husband, a Cardinal willing to pay any price for her favour, a quick-witted adventurer who coveted a secure income, and a tradesman in dread of ruin. There were others in the background: Cagliostro, the clever Italian impostor who by prophesying Rohan's return to the queen's favour, gained profit for himself; Rétaux de Villette, forger of the letters; Planta, the Swiss baron, who acted as Rohan's go-between; and, sparkling and inanimate, the precious stones themselves.

Madame de la Motte saw her opportunity, and set Rétaux de Villette to work. He produced a

<sup>1</sup> Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 6.



document in which the queen was supposed to state the conditions under which she was willing to buy the necklace. This was given to the Cardinal by Madame de la Motte, who assured him that the queen really desired the jewels, but that as the king thought them too dear she could not make the purchase openly, and therefore Marie-Antoinette requested M. de Rohan to act for her, and promised to pay the price of the necklace. The Cardinal sent for the jewellers, who agreed to the conditions, and on February 1st, 1785, Bœhmer and Bassange carried him the precious casket, saw the forged document with the word "approved" and the queen's signature at the end of each paragraph, believed it genuine, and delivered up their treasure, worth 1,600,000 francs.

The same day Rohan drove to the Place Dauphine, found the countess in her pretty rooms, and with his own hand placed the casket in hers. "The queen expects it," said the lady; "it shall be sent her this evening," and as she spoke a servant told her that a messenger desired to speak with her. "From the queen?" she asked eagerly, whereupon the Cardinal, believing himself a secret agent, hid in a recess. The messenger entered, handed the countess a note, and was dismissed. The Cardinal issued from his hiding-place. "It is an order from the queen to receive the





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*From plate in 'Mémoires de l'abbé Georget.'*



necklace," said Madame de la Motte, and the messenger being recalled the casket was delivered up, and neither Rohan nor the queen nor the jewellers saw the necklace more.<sup>1</sup>

It was a busy evening in the Place Dauphine, and a few days later M. de la Motte was in London and had sold and dispersed the greater part of the stones put together with such care.

Meantime the Cardinal watched anxiously for some token of friendliness from the queen, while the jewellers waited in the corridors of Versailles on every great state occasion anxious to see the necklace worn and thus assure themselves of the safety of their treasure. But Cardinal and jewellers waited in vain. The necklace was not worn, nor was any notice whatever taken of Rohan.

He grew uneasy. By the terms of purchase the first payment was to be made in July, but instead of money the Cardinal received a letter asking him to obtain a reduction in the price agreed upon and deferring payment until August, and by-and-bye another letter delayed payment of the instalment until October. It was not queenly conduct, but the Cardinal had not demanded queenly conduct from his sovereign, and it was only the sight of an authentic letter written by Marie-Antoinette which

<sup>1</sup> Campardon, *Procès du Collier*. Interrogatoire du Cardinal de Rohan.

at length aroused his suspicion. In his perplexity he went to Cagliostro, who gave him honest advice, telling him to go and confess the whole matter to the king. But Rohan would not condescend to be discovered a fool ; he preferred to remain a rogue. On this Madame de la Motte had counted, and when in August Bœhmer and Bassange, alarmed at the non-payment of their money, went to her in great distress, she boldly admitted that the queen's signature in the document they had seen was false, and advised them to go to the Cardinal and make him pay.<sup>1</sup>

Bassange went to Rohan, but Bœhmer went straight to Madame Campan, and from her heard that he had indeed been deceived, while a few days later Madame Campan told Marie-Antoinette what had been done. The queen sent for the jeweller and commanded him to write out a statement of the whole transaction ; this she received on the 12th of August, and on the 14th she showed it to her husband. The king had no reason to respect the Cardinal, whose life was dissolute, who was known to be in debt, and even to have appropriated the alms of the poor for his own wicked pleasures. It was little wonder if both Louis and Marie-Antoinette believed that he had adopted this means of getting rid of pressing difficulties, regardless of

<sup>1</sup> Camperdon, *Procès du Collier*, p. 102 seq.



consequences to a queen who had always treated him with marked dislike.

Next day as the Cardinal waited to attend mid-day mass in the chapel of Versailles, he was summoned to the king's presence and there, before Marie-Antoinette, M. de Miromesnil, keeper of the seals, and M. de Breteuil, Minister of the King's Household, was charged with buying the diamonds from Bœhmer, and was asked who had entrusted him with the commission. He confessed that he had acted on a letter written by the queen and shown him by a lady called Madame de la Motte, adding that he had acted in the hope of pleasing the queen. On hearing this Marie-Antoinette was roused. "What, sir," she cried, "could you believe that I should choose *you*, you to whom I have not spoken for eight years, to execute any such commission, or that a woman like Madame de la Motte should be my intermediary?"

It was a bitter humiliation, nor was it lessened when the Cardinal took from his pocket-book the paper authorising the purchase. Rétaux de Villette had done his best, but he was ignorant of one little detail of which, strange to say, neither the Cardinal nor the court jewellers knew or had noted the significance. Louis looked at the paper and exclaimed: "Is it possible that you, a prince of the house of Rohan and Grand Almoner of France, could imagine that the Queen would sign Marie-

Antoinette *de France*? Everyone knows that queens use only their baptismal names." The Cardinal staggered and leant on a table for support. "I have no wish to find you guilty," added the king, "I desire your justification. . . . Go into my cabinet, monsieur: you will find paper, pen, and ink, write what you have to say."<sup>1</sup> It was a confused account which, after a quarter of an hour, the Cardinal presented to the king, and it confirmed Louis' suspicions. At once an order was given to arrest the Cardinal, and that night he slept in the Bastille.

The arrest and imprisonment of a member of the Rohan-Soubise family caused a profound sensation in Paris and Versailles. Every house allied to the Rohans, even the Condés, princes of the blood though they were, sided with the Cardinal against the Crown. The old prejudice against the Austrian was at the root of much of the animosity, and this was intensified by the offended pride of the old nobility whom the queen had slighted, and by the bitterness with which Madame de Marsan and the Devout had always regarded her. Added to these things were the folly and extravagance of the last few years, which gave to the story of the necklace so plausible an air that men believed it, and looked upon the queen's attitude towards Rohan as vindictive rather than dignified.

<sup>1</sup> See Madame Campan, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 12 *seq.* for full account.

Marie-Antoinette was indeed very angry, and demanded a trial of the Cardinal and exposure of the whole case. To this Vergennes and the wiser friends of the monarchy were strongly opposed. They thought it unwise to allow the queen's name to appear in a court of justice; it was derogatory to the idea of the sanctity of the crown, and a plaintiff as much as a defendant is on trial. They knew also the power of the Rohans, and that among their number were some of Marie-Antoinette's bitterest enemies, and they urged a policy of inaction. But the king would listen to no argument. "As king and as husband,"<sup>1</sup> said Louis, "I cannot pass this over; although a Cardinal, the Prince de Rohan is none the less a subject of the crown,"<sup>2</sup> and the delinquent was given the choice of acknowledging his fault and submitting himself to the king's will or of being tried by the Parlement of Paris. Rohan knew his power and chose the latter. His choice was disapproved of by the church both in France and at Rome. As a bishop, the clergy of France considered him amenable to ecclesiastical courts alone, and as a cardinal, Rome also objected to his submission to the civil power. In both cases the

<sup>1</sup> La Rocheterie, *Recueil de lettres de Marie-Antoinette*, vol. ii. p. 76. Letter of 22nd August to Joseph II.

<sup>2</sup> *Louis XVI., Marie-Antoinette et Mme. Elisabeth*, vol. i. p. 152.

objection was made in the interests of the Cardinal, and was a reflection on the most Christian king, who had suggested a civil court to a servant of the church. But Louis was firm and the Cardinal well content, for he "considered Parlement the surest means of unmasking the intrigue of which he was the victim."<sup>1</sup>

The preliminaries of the trial lasted long. The arrest of Madame de la Motte and her accomplices followed immediately on that of Rohan, but it was not until the 30th of May, 1786, that the accused appeared before the Parlement of Paris in that Grand'chambre of the Palais de Justice already so often referred to. The interest and excitement were great. The people gathered in crowds about the old building, and the Rohans, the Condés, the Guéménées—all the families related to the Cardinal—dressed themselves in mourning and stood in line on either side of the door of the Grand'chambre waiting for the coming of the judges. When they arrived, Madame de Marsan, now an old lady, stepped out of the line. "Gentlemen," she said, "you judge us all."<sup>2</sup>

The trial was that of all the accused, but the complicity of Madame de la Motte and her agents

<sup>1</sup> *L'Abbé Georgel, Mémoires de*, vol. ii. p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> *Corresp. de la Comtesse de Sabran et du chevalier de Boufflers*, p. 121.



was admitted, and the chief interest for the public lay in the trial of the Cardinal. He entered the court after the other prisoners, and was pale, but held himself erect. He was treated with marked courtesy by his judges; the questions he was asked were planned for his exoneration, while his declaration that his desire to gain the favour of the queen had completely blinded him was received with loud applause. As he left the hall at the end of the first day's examination the entire court rose to return the bow with which he had saluted it.<sup>1</sup>

It was nine o'clock on the evening of the 31st of May when the sentences were pronounced. There had been a difference of opinion as to the Cardinal's deserts. The Procurator-General, acting for the king, proposed that the prisoner should acknowledge in court that he had acted foolishly, should make a public apology to the king and queen, and should suffer certain penalties. This proposal was received with scorn, but there were some among the judges who were unwilling to let the Cardinal go without some mark of disapproval. They, however, were unable to carry their point, and by a majority of five the verdict returned was one of honourable acquittal.

There was intense excitement as the sentences were pronounced. Something like ten thousand persons thronged the corridors and Salle des Pas

<sup>1</sup> *L'Abbé Georgel, Mémoires de*, vol. ii. p. 200 *seq.*

Perdus. No one cared much that Madame de la Motte was condemned to prison for life, and her husband to the galleys; but when it was known that the Cardinal was acquitted shouts of joy filled the Palais and greeted the judges as they left the Grand'chambre, and the same shouts accompanied the Cardinal as he drove next day from the Bastille to his hôtel, brilliantly lit up to welcome his return. There his relatives awaited him, the *poissardes*<sup>1</sup> who had taunted Marie-Antoinette on her childlessness in the corridors of Versailles did him honour, and the Paris mob compelled him to appear on his balcony.

It was a short-lived triumph. The Cardinal was at once stripped of all honours held from the crown and was exiled from court, while his friends, having secured his acquittal, were content to have no more to do with him. "Congratulate me," said Madame de Marsan, "he is gone!"<sup>2</sup> But though short-lived, the triumph of the Cardinal left lasting results. It was a direct blow to the monarchy. Parlement had acquitted where the king had condemned; it had suffered insult to the queen without remonstrance, while the very indifference now shown by the Cardinal's partisans towards the man they had supported added a bitter significance to their act.

<sup>1</sup> See page 259.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance secrète inédite sur Louis XVI. Marie-Antoinette, la cour et la ville de 1777 à 1792*, vol. ii. p 48.

The queen was deeply wounded—"more," wrote Mercy, "than seems reasonable."<sup>1</sup> But Marie-Antoinette had reason, for a blow had been struck at her reputation from which she never recovered. The shadow had fallen on her path, and it went on deepening to the end. "The *queen*," says M. de Falloux, "was still brilliant, but the *woman* had neither gaiety nor confidence."<sup>2</sup> "The queen," wrote her friend and correspondent, Gustave III. of Sweden, "is said to have grown devout. The suffering of the past year and a desire to recover the respect of the people have caused the change."<sup>3</sup> But the respect of the people, alas! is easier to lose than to regain.

That year the court spent part of the autumn at St. Cloud, Marie-Antoinette's new palace on the Seine, near Suresnes. She hoped that a nearer proximity to Paris might help to restore to her the love of the people, and she took pains to be seen in the grounds with the little Dauphin on fête days; but cries of "Vive le Dauphin" and "Vive le Roi" only emphasised the absence of "Vive la Reine." "We are going to St. Cloud to see the fountains and the Austrian," the people said, and the Austrian walked among them proud and cold, "hiding her suffering

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*, vol. ii. p. 28. *Lettre à Joseph II.*, 12 July, 1786.

<sup>2</sup> Falloux, *Vie de Louis XVI.*, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> *Gustave III. et la cour de France*, vol. ii. p. 86.



under an air of haughtiness, which was itself a fresh offence." <sup>1</sup>

From this time there was less foundation for the old complaints against the queen. She ceased to be extravagant in dress, gave up games of chance, held court with dignity, and exchanged her young society for an older and graver one. She spent much time with her children, now four in number, and also with her young sister-in-law, Elizabeth, whose goodness and sprightliness had engaged Marie-Antoinette's affections, while towards her husband she felt sincere gratitude for the loyalty he had shown her in the matter of the necklace. "I can never forget," she wrote to Joseph, "the king's conduct towards me; it has been perfect throughout." <sup>2</sup>

The pity was that the very event which helped to develop the character of the queen had at the same time crystallised public opinion concerning her. The Marie-Antoinette henceforth held up to scorn was already becoming a better woman than the Marie-Antoinette who, years ago, by her easy grace and pleasant ways, had gained popular applause. But the change came too late. Before there was time for it to be felt and recognised Versailles, the Little Trianon, the old regime itself, had fallen; and as they fell, they lay.

<sup>1</sup> Nolhac, *La reine Marie-Antoinette*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Marie-Antoinette, Joseph II., und Léopold*, vol. ii. p. 95.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### CALONNE.



VERGENNES.

ONLY two years and a half had passed since France and England had signed the treaty which ended the American War, since France had been acknowledged "formidable and triumphant"<sup>1</sup> and the welcome of her queen was counted as high honour by the men who

had fought on behalf of the insurgents. And now in this same year of 1786 the queen was forced to face the havoc wrought on her reputation, and the Treasury to acknowledge a deficit which could no longer be ignored.

<sup>1</sup> See a speech of Fox, delivered in February, 1790; quoted in Lord Rosebery's *Pitt*, p. 119.

M. de Fleury's ministry ended in March, 1783, and ended in discredit. Embarrassed, hampered, not knowing where to turn in order to fulfil his obligations, Fleury, with the approval of Vergennes, refused payment of certain *lettres de change* issued by the French colonies on the Department of the Marine. The act was discreditable, and M. de Castries, Minister of the Marine, indignantly denied any knowledge of it. A quarrel followed, and Fleury resigned. He was succeeded by M. d'Ormesson, too inexperienced to grapple with the difficulties, and too honest to escape the pitfalls of his office, who, after six months' endeavour and failure, gave it up in despair.

And now, who was there to undertake the onerous post? On the answer all depended. "Things might yet go well," wrote Mercy to the Emperor Joseph in November, 1783, "if the authority were restored to the hands of an able man, but one may rest assured that it will be long before such a man is sought, or even the necessity of seeking him is recognised. It is known that the king dislikes and fears a clever minister. It is on this account that the finance is absolutely barred to M. Necker, for whose recall the whole nation is crying out."<sup>1</sup> Events had justified Mercy's assertion.

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*, vol. i. p. 225.

Castries went to the king and urged the return of Necker, but turned away disheartened, for the king was resolute in his refusal.

Of the others whose names were mentioned, M. de Calonne, Intendant of Lille, was the most zealous in seeking and the most fortunate in finding support. His rival Loménie de Brienne, Archbishop of Toulouse, was a member of the États de Languedoc, where his influence was known to be exerted on the side of reform. He had the support of the queen, of the Comte de Mercy, and the Abbé de Vermond. Calonne had neither Austrian support nor reforming tendencies and was better suited for carrying on Fleury's retrogressive work. "He was," says M. Cherest, "a typical minister of the old regime, humble and submissive in manner, clever, witty, and attractive."<sup>1</sup> He was clever in expedients, had experience in the management of money, and a rare capacity for work. He declared himself competent to direct the finances, nay, even to fill the Treasury without recourse to the beggarly economies so annoying to courtiers. All this pleased the courtiers, as Calonne intended it should, and the Comte d'Artois, the Polignac faction, the queen's intimates, and even Marie-Antoinette herself, though at first unwilling, urged his merits on

<sup>1</sup> Cherest, *La chute de l'ancien régime*, vol. i. p. 120.

the king.<sup>1</sup> Louis hesitated; Calonne was deeply in debt, "in debt to God, to the devil, and to men."<sup>2</sup> Upright himself, the king did not care to select a debtor as his Minister of Finance. But irresolute as usual he yielded, and consented in November, 1783, to the appointment of one whom Maurepas had once declared would, "if he were minister, empty the Treasury as quickly as he had emptied his own purse."<sup>3</sup>

The king and queen had not done well by France. It said something for Marie-Antoinette that she saw and repented her mistake, while it augured ill for the future that the specious minister soon acquired complete ascendancy over Louis. Calonne understood and flattered the weaknesses of the king; he did not trouble him with difficulties, either in *mémoires* or in finance; for all necessities the new minister had a resource, and Louis stood astonished at the excellence of his choice. In this astonishment the king was not alone. For a time Calonne carried all before him. He paid up arrears due to the holders of government stock, he granted the demands of the discontented in Brittany, and he even satisfied the rapacity of the courtiers. In his first moments of success he raised a loan for one hundred million

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*, vol. i. p. 227 *seq.* note.

<sup>2</sup> D'Augeard, *Mémoires*, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 106.



francs, and could easily have raised more. "I knew," said a well-known nobleman, "that Calonne would save the country, but I did not know he would do it so quickly."<sup>1</sup>

Some years later Calonne boasted that he had destroyed nothing which his predecessors had effected, and he cited several instances to prove his assertion. But his policy was none the less reactionary. To secure partisans by any and every means, "to spend largely in order to appear rich, and to appear rich in order to borrow largely,"<sup>2</sup> were not the maxims of a Turgot or a Necker, but they were those of Calonne.

Unfortunately for his continued popularity in Paris, Calonne carried these maxims to their greatest perfection in his dealings with the courtiers. The day of pensions and benefits returned, the old abuses of interests in monopolies revived, no one was refused, and few abstained from asking. "When I saw all the world extend him their hand, I held my hat,"<sup>3</sup> said one of the princes, in scorn of minister and courtier alike. The king's brothers found in him a ready solution of money difficulties; to the Polignacs and their faction he proved a "key to the royal coffers,"<sup>4</sup> while it was under his regime

<sup>1</sup> Ségur, *Mémoires ou Souvenirs*, vol. ii. p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> H. Martin, *Histoire de France*, vol. xvi. p. 542.

<sup>3</sup> Droz, i. 406.

<sup>4</sup> Nohac, *La reine Marie-Antoinette*, p. 36.

that St. Cloud passed into the possession of the queen, and her name was coupled with that of the Polignacs in the Paris satires on the extravagance of the minister :

Calonne n'est pas ce que j'aime  
 Mais c'est l'or qu'il n'épargne pas ;  
 Quand je suis dans quelque embarras  
 Alors je m'adresse à lui-même,  
 Ma favorite fait de même ;  
 Et puis nous en rions tout bas  
 Tout bas, tout bas, tout bas, tout bas.<sup>1</sup>

So wrote the Paris pamphleteers, and the derision which they made the queen express towards the Minister of Finance was only that which public opinion re-echoed. Lavish towards the courtiers, lavish in his expenditure on public works, careless of expense in his administration of the finances, he had not done that for which he was chosen—he had not filled the Treasury.

The loan of one hundred million francs, raised in December, 1783, was followed in December, 1784, by another of one hundred and twenty-five millions. In asking for the second loan Calonne had not urged want of funds, but had suggested the desirability of his having money in hand so as to get the finances into good order, and he had implied that this loan would be the last.<sup>2</sup> But neither order

<sup>1</sup> Nolhac, *La reine Marie-Antoinette*, quoted p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> See British Museum Pamphlets, R. 32, De Calonne, Extracts from *Édits* in vol. i. p. 37 *seq.*



CALONNE.

PAINTED BY MADAME VIGÉE LE BRUN.

*From 'Tableaux historiques de la Révolution française.'*





nor economy resulted, and once more in December, 1785, the Parlement of Paris was asked to sanction a further loan of eighty millions. This time Parlement was indignant. There were no war expenses, no relief had been given in taxation, no economy shown in administration, nothing but empty promises. But Louis, still under the spell of Calonne's seductive readiness, declared himself satisfied with his Controller-General, and ordered registration, and Parlement, fearing worse things for France from resistance than from submission, registered the edict.

Calonne got his eighty million francs, but he knew that he dared not ask for another loan, and the eighty millions were not enough. He therefore resorted to expedients for obtaining money which he must have known were useless, and Mercy, writing to the Emperor in March, 1786, thus describes the alternation of feeling which this policy produced: "When extravagance and waste have exhausted the royal treasure there is an outcry of terror and distress; at this the minister employs some suicidal way of raising money, such as this last of melting gold coins and re-issuing them with a false proportion of metal.<sup>1</sup> Such temporary resources relieve the pressure, and the public pass from distress to a sense of security with a readiness which is

<sup>1</sup> See British Museum Pamphlets, R. 32, De Calonne, *M. de Calonne tout entier*, p. 213 *seq.*

inconceivable. But what is very certain is that the present government has exceeded that of Louis XV. in mismanagement and theft, and that it is morally impossible that this state of things can last much longer."<sup>1</sup>

Calonne knew this as well as the Austrian minister. On the 31st December, 1786, the third *vingtième* imposed by Fleury in 1783 expired, and with it the Treasury would lose twenty-one million francs of yearly revenue. It was the last straw. Parlement had deserted him. The nation had lost confidence. The queen had never liked him. Louis and the courtiers alone were his friends. But Louis' approval rested upon ignorance of the real state of the finances, and Calonne had before him the unwelcome duty of telling the king the truth. Had he only done this when he first realised how hopeless was the condition of the Treasury his place in history would be very different. Calonne's administration contributed to the disorder in the finances, but it did not cause them.<sup>2</sup> There were debts dating from the reign of Louis XV., debts left by the American war,<sup>3</sup> debts caused by the threatened

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*, Lettre à Joseph II., 10th March, 1786, vol. ii. p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> See on the question of the deficit, Cherest, *La chute de l'ancien régime*, vol. i. chap. ii.

<sup>3</sup> It is only fair to remember that Calonne paid off the debt on the American War.

war between Austria and Holland, for which Calonne was not responsible; and debts for public works and extravagance, for which he was. But besides the debts there was the yet more serious evil of an annual deficit, a yearly expenditure greater than the yearly revenues could meet, and with this the knowledge that the only possible manner of increasing the yearly revenue lay in taxation of the privileged. It was perhaps little wonder that Calonne, a courtier of the old school, kept silence as long as he could.

And now that confession was imperative, his readiness of resource came to his help. A statesman who can always find a way out of every difficulty is not one who has a fixed policy. It therefore cost Calonne very little to change his tactics completely and prepare a plan of reform borrowed from his predecessors. He proposed to abolish the *corvée* and the Customs duties on goods passing from one province to another in France; to reform the corn-laws, to diminish the *taille* which was the heaviest, and to lighten the *gabelle* which was the most vexatious of the taxes; to carry out Necker's scheme of instituting a provincial assembly in every province which was not a *Pays d'États*, at the same time supplementing the provincial assemblies by the assemblies of the parish and of the *arrondissement* proposed by Turgot, and



—greatest innovation of all—to substitute for the *vingtièmes* a land-tax which should fall on privileged and unprivileged alike. In order to recoup the Treasury for the loss incurred by the lessening of taxes he proposed a greatly extended tax on those who held official appointments, that is, a stamp act, and promised economies to the extent of twenty million francs. As some compensation to the privileged he exempted them from *capitation*.

By presenting such a scheme Calonne believed that he could revive his own popularity with the nation, and also retain the favour of the king. But there were difficulties in the way. The king and the people might welcome his great scheme, the parlements certainly would not, and to avoid their opposition Calonne fell back on what was known as an Assembly of Notables. This was a body chosen from the prelates, peers, soldiers, judges, great proprietors, and municipal authorities of France,<sup>1</sup> as specially qualified to consult with the king in seasons of difficulty. Although chosen almost exclusively from the privileged classes they represented wider interests than did the parlements, and being chosen and summoned personally by the king were supposed to be amenable to his will; nor had they, like the parlements, a tradition of resistance. On the other hand, what was approved by an assembly among

<sup>1</sup> See Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 198 *seq.*



whom sat the First Presidents of the parlements of France could hardly be afterwards opposed by these bodies themselves. Thus the Assembly of Notables seemed in every respect suited to the purpose Calonne had in view.

But before proposing his scheme to Louis, Calonne wished to secure the support of Vergennes. That minister was no friend to reform and was not at first prepared to accept so revolutionary a plan, but he knew the difficulties of the finance and he hated the parlements. Calonne persuaded him that the calling together of Notables summoned by the sovereign to deliberate independently of the Parliament of Paris or of any other parlement would deal those bodies a deadly blow, and would make the government more free thereafter to carry out its ideas in an autocratic spirit. Vergennes yielded and Calonne was now ready to face the king.

It was no pleasant task. In his *Compte rendu* of 1781 Necker had announced "the state of finances such, that despite the deficit existing in 1776 (the year in which he took office), despite the heavy expenses of the war, despite loans, the ordinary revenues of your Majesty exceed at this moment the ordinary expenses by ten million francs."<sup>1</sup> But Necker's calculations took no account of extraordinary expenses, and were based on the

<sup>1</sup> Necker, *Compte rendu*, p. 9 seq.

ordinary receipts and expenses of an imagined average year. Men thought they were based on the actual accounts for 1781, and trusted them; the anxiety of France regarding finance was set at rest, and on this subject the nation was "in profound error."<sup>1</sup> The error was upheld by the early policy of Calonne; the extravagance and folly of the minister was blamed, but the state of things to which this extravagance served as a veil was guessed at only by the few. "Perhaps never," Calonne himself says, "was the public security less disturbed . . . than under my administration."<sup>2</sup> In this security the king had shared.

Calonne had kept his hold on the king by his facility in evading difficulties and by allowing Louis to believe that none of any gravity existed.<sup>3</sup> He had now to confess to a deficit of 114 million francs. To prepare his master's mind for the confession, Calonne had for some time past reverted to the deficit which had existed in the time of his predecessors. This deficit he now described as the cause of his difficulties, although he was forced to acknowledge that it had increased under his own administration; and then, before the king had time to express consternation at the amount of debt

<sup>1</sup> Cherest, *La chute de l'ancien régime*, vol. i. p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> Calonne, *Requête au roi*, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> See in relation to this British Museum Pamphlets, R. 32, De Calonne, *Récit d'un de M. M. au sujet de M. de C.*

which the trusted minister had incurred, Calonne proposed his scheme of reform as an efficient remedy.

The remedy was as astounding as the disease. "What," exclaimed the king, "it is Necker. Necker, pure and simple that you propose to me." "Sire," replied Calonne frankly, "in the present state of things I have nothing better to offer," and with ready persuasive tongue he drew for the simple-minded monarch a glowing picture of all the good he was about to confer; of how his name would be handed down to posterity as the Saviour of his People, and of the glory which this Assembly of Notables would reflect on the name of Louis XVI. With the optimism of stupidity the king believed him. Louis had the utmost belief in his own goodwill towards the people, and there is abundant evidence that the people regarded him with very different feelings from those displayed towards Marie-Antoinette. On the 27th of March, 1785, his second son, Louis-Charles, Duke of Normandy, was born, and Marie-Antoinette, already conscious of public disapprobation, dreaded the visit of thanksgiving to Paris, that had now become customary on the birth of her children. Her dread was justified, for her reception in the city was markedly cold, and the queen was not comforted by the welcome given her at the Opera. She knew which



was the more significant, and on her return to Versailles told her husband her distress. Louis, blunt and obtuse, replied, "I do not know how it is so with you. I never go to Paris without shouts which almost make me giddy."<sup>1</sup> The uprightness of his life, his personal unselfishness, his constantly-expressed, if somewhat vague, desire for the welfare of his people, called forth their loyalty, and of this loyalty the king had fresh proof immediately after the affair of the necklace had ended in the acquittal of the Cardinal.

One of the best things done under the administration of Calonne was the extension of the harbour of Cherbourg, on the coast of Normandy—the great naval harbour of France. The work was finished in the early summer of 1786, and in June the king paid it an official visit. It was the first time Louis XVI. had made a journey other than that of court routine, and his reception was enthusiastic. This journey, we are told, "was a succession of fêtes which were unfeignedly cordial,"<sup>2</sup> and the king himself writes to Marie-Antoinette, "I am the happiest king in the world. My people love me, as I love them."<sup>3</sup> The pamphlets of the hour confirmed the king's impression. "A father who

<sup>1</sup> Droz, quoted in *Règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 432, note.

<sup>2</sup> Falloux, *Vie de Louis XVI.*, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 144.



visits his children, and whose presence excites in them all the transports of affection,"<sup>1</sup> is only one of the many exaggerated expressions of loyalty which the king interpreted as the voice of France, and which made this journey one of the happiest episodes in his life.

There was more in the feeling of the populace—the great mass of the people—towards the king than mere thoughtless appreciation of easy good-nature. There was a belief that he was their protector against the indifference and selfishness of the privileged. They knew that every reform originated in the crown, or—what was in their eyes the same—in a minister of the crown, and they could not fail to see that every obstruction came from the privileged. To the king, therefore, the people looked for relief, and their faith in him was hard to kill. All this Calonne knew when he proposed to make Louis play the rôle of Saviour of his People.

<sup>1</sup> British Museum Pamphlets, F.R., 116, Louis XVI. 1., *La France et l'Angleterre*.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE NOTABLES.



LOMÉNIE DE BRIENNE.

ON December 29th, 1786, Louis announced to his Council that he was about to call together an assembly of persons of different conditions of life, "the best qualified in his State," that he might announce to them his intentions con-

cerning the relief of the people, the setting in order of the finances and the reform of certain abuses.<sup>1</sup>

The announcement had a kingly ring, but it was received at Versailles with concern. "The king has abdicated,"<sup>2</sup> said the Vicomte de Ségur; "Versailles falls, France rises," echoed the courtiers, and the

<sup>1</sup> Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> Besenval, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 208.

opinion of graver men coincided with theirs. "I have prayed the king to weigh well the consequences of such a decision," wrote Ségur, Minister of War and father of the Vicomte, "in the present state of feeling the Notables may lead to the States-General with what result who can guess."<sup>1</sup> "The Controller-General has entered on a path from which he can with difficulty draw back," wrote Mercy to Kaunitz.<sup>2</sup> "I am very old, but I should like to be older still," said the Cardinal de Bernis—he who thirty years before had negotiated the Austrian alliance—"and I fear the future."<sup>3</sup>

The queen feared it also. She was hurt and indignant because the king had consented to a request made by Calonne and had kept his project—first mooted in August—a secret from every one, from his brothers, his councillors, and even from the queen herself. Her own unpopularity and her husband's incapacity weighed on her spirits. Her brother urged on her increased interest in politics, increased ascendancy over her husband; but "she had never," wrote Mercy, "disguised from the king the weariness which matters of government excited in her";<sup>4</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> Ségur, *Mémoires ou souvenirs*, vol. ii. p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*, vol. ii. p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> Masson, *Le Cardinal de Bernis depuis son ministère*, p. 448.

<sup>4</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*, vol. ii. p. 69.

now, when she herself had changed and affairs of state had begun to interest her, she questioned, and with reason, her power to influence. The path on which Calonne had entered was opposed to the political creed by which, despite her levity, Marie-Antoinette held, and which from this time forward determined her policy. The divine right of kings, the maintenance of the prerogatives of the crown, reforms which when necessary proceeded solely from the will of the king, such were the articles of Marie-Antoinette's political faith. It was a policy of race and birth, narrow and insufficient, but it was one in which she believed as good for mankind, and her faith in it gave her a certain force on which the court party could rely. The king and his ministers might vacillate; Marie-Antoinette at least knew her mind.

Meantime, while the queen and court were uneasy, Paris shrugged its shoulders and wrote skits. It announced a new *troupe* of comedians who would play before the court a grand piece entitled "False Confidences," and a little play entitled "Forced Consent," to be followed by the "Barrel of the Danaïdes, a pantomime composed by M. de Calonne."<sup>1</sup>

The king's attitude was very different. The last Assembly of Notables had been summoned by

<sup>1</sup> Droz, *Le règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 475, note.



Henri IV. in 1626, and Louis who remembered the "Resurrexit" scribbled in 1774 on the statue of that popular king, and who likened himself to his great predecessor, saw "Resurrexit," written now by his own hand on the statute-book of history. "I have not slept all night," he wrote to Calonne, "but it was from pleasure."<sup>1</sup> He pictured an obedient Assembly, flattered by the summons to advise on the measures of their sovereign, ready to acquiesce in all his proposals, as pleased as he himself was at the mention of reform. The king saw things not as they were but as he would have them be.

And there were many who shared Louis' hopeful spirit. In the provinces there was faith in the king, and an honest desire that the Notables would further his projects, while the *Mémoires* and pamphlets of the day are not all by any means despondent or contemptuous. "I dined with the Maréchal de Beauvau on Friday the 29th," wrote M. Bailly, afterwards the first president of the National Assembly, "and there, for the first time, heard the news of an assembly of Notables. I was much struck and foresaw changes in the existing state of things and even in the form of government. . . . This assembly of one hundred and fifty citizens, from all classes and of the highest distinction, could not fail to bring about great reforms. . . . I foresaw,

<sup>1</sup> Weber, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 186.

not a revolution, but a change, which in one way or another must prove of benefit to the nation.”<sup>1</sup> And Lafayette, writing to Washington on the 13th of January, 1787, said, “The king has summoned an assembly of Notables for the end of this month. . . . As you will easily understand, the need for money in one form or another is at the bottom of it all, . . . but no nobler or more patriotic way of attaining that end can be imagined, and the king and his minister deserve our thanks . . . It is my ardent wish and cherished hope that this gathering may bring about assemblies in the provinces, the destruction of restrictions on trade and a change in the condition of Protestants.”<sup>2</sup> “To re-establish the harmony which should exist between the king and the people, to render impossible the perpetual change of policy in the ministry, to make the nobles return to the provinces, to submit finance to severe reform”;<sup>3</sup> such were the hopes raised by the summoning of the Notables. What the country cried out for was confidence in the policy of the crown, some certainty that reforms proposed would be effected, and it behoved king and minister to see to it that France was not disappointed.

<sup>1</sup> Bailly, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires et correspondances de Lafayette*, publiés par sa famille, vol. ii. p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> British Museum Pamphlets, F.R. 460, Finance i. *Fragment d'une correspondance*.

Unfortunately the possibility of disappointment did not enter into the calculations of either Louis or Calonne. The king busied himself with matters of procedure and ceremonial, and the minister, intoxicated by the idea of success, was careless in his choice of Notables and dilatory in the preparation of the measures to be submitted to them. The Notables were one hundred and forty-four in number,<sup>1</sup> and of all these only three or four truly represented the unprivileged. The rest whether municipal officers or deputies of the *Pays d'États* were either "nobles or men seeking to become nobles, men who knew little of the ideas and cared less for the interests of the Third Estate."<sup>2</sup> There were among them men whom Calonne knew to be his enemies, and whose names a certain bravado seems to have induced him to propose to the king. Among these was the Archbishop of Toulouse, Loménie de Brienne, who was known to covet Calonne's post and not to be troubled by scruples.

Nor was the minister ready to meet the Notables on the day fixed by the king. The Assembly was summoned for the 29th of January, 1787, but Calonne, dilatory at first and afterwards overworked,

<sup>1</sup> List of Notables: 7 princes of the blood; 36 dukes, peers, marshals, and great proprietors; 14 archbishops and bishops; 38 first presidents of the parlements, procurators, and magistrates; 12 councillors; 12 deputies from the *Pays d'États*; and 25 municipal officers. See Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 182, for names.

<sup>2</sup> Cherest, *La chute de l'ancien régime*, vol. i. p. 133.



had fallen ill, and the 7th, the 14th, and finally the 22nd of February had come before the Assembly actually met. Meantime the enthusiasm of its provincial members had been chilled, for the members summoned from the Parlement of Paris regarded the Assembly as a blow struck with intention at the parlements, and took no pains to conceal their opinion, while the country clergy heard it whispered by Loménie de Brienne that no good foreboded the church.

But besides general talk there was time for concerted action, and by-and-bye the king and minister found themselves face to face with what were virtually two self-constituted committees. The one was composed of the clergy, and met at the house of the Archbishop of Narbonne, a prelate ready to sacrifice his own interests and to further reform, but determined that reform should not touch on the dignity of the church. The other was composed of the Presidents of the parlements, who agreed not to commit themselves on any point which should be submitted to them that they might be free to remonstrate should Calonne's projects be sent to their parlements for registration;<sup>1</sup> its meeting-place was no other than the house of Miromesnil, Keeper of the King's Seals.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Droz, *Le règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 476.

<sup>2</sup> Besenval, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 215 *seq.*



Among the nobles there was no concerted action, but there were many elements of discord. There was Lafayette, too ambitious and too full of American ideas to be content to accept proposals quietly ; the Duc de la Rochefoucauld and the Duc de Nivernais, disinterested and noble-hearted but distrustful of Calonne ; there was Monsieur, always ready to head a party, and the Duc d'Orléans, glad of opportunity to oppose the crown. Where was the ready acquiescence for which Louis looked ?

Meantime the king, who had settled his points of precedence more quickly than Calonne had prepared the terms of his scheme, received on Sunday, the 4th of February, those Notables who had not already been presented at Versailles ; the *noblesse de robe*, in his council chamber, the heads of municipalities in his *chambre de parade*.<sup>1</sup> A week later Vergennes, Minister of Foreign Affairs for over twelve years, died. His death was a misfortune, for his policy had maintained and added to the prestige of France among other nations, and at this crisis it was a blow to Calonne. The privileged trusted him, and if in internal affairs his policy had been reactionary and in favour of the old regime, the support he had pledged to Calonne's proposals would for that very reason have been a guarantee of their necessity. In him the king lost a statesman,

and in M. de Montmorin, his successor, gained only an upright servant.

At length, on Thursday, the 22nd of February, the Notables met in the Hall of the King's Lesser Pleasures, the same in which two years later the States-General were assembled. At half-past ten in the morning the king and the seven princes of the blood attended a low mass in the chapel at Versailles. Places were provided for any Notables who cared to come, but it was not thought consistent with etiquette to invite them there. The grand master of ceremonies was with the king. His subordinate, the master, was in the hall, and showed each member his place.<sup>1</sup> The state carriages drove the royal party from the palace down the wide avenue which led to the hall, but no cry of "Vive le Roi"<sup>2</sup> responded to the hopefulness of Louis or lightened the despondency of Marie-Antoinette. Of all cities, Versailles was perhaps the least loyal.

The king opened the Assembly by a short speech. "Gentlemen," he said, "I have chosen you from the different orders of the State, and have summoned you to hear my proposals. In this I follow the example of my predecessors, and notably that of the first of my house (Henry IV.) whose name is dear to France, and whose example I shall make

<sup>1</sup> Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets*, vol. 34, p. 207.

it my glory to follow." He then briefly summed up his proposals, and added—"As these all tend to the public good, and as I know your zeal in my service, I do not fear to consult you in their execution. I shall listen to and attentively examine your observations."<sup>1</sup>

The king's speech was followed by others, the most important of which was that of Calonne. He began by a *résumé* of the happy results of the king's reign and an account of his own administration. He defended his lavishness on the ground that "all his resources, when the king first entrusted him with the control of the finance, depended on credit, and that to its restoration all his efforts had been directed."<sup>2</sup> He explained the difficulty of arriving at an accurate knowledge of the accounts, and confessed the sad fact which such knowledge revealed—a deficit too large to make good without radical reform, but he kept silence as to its amount.

From the fact of a "very considerable" annual deficit the minister turned to the possible remedies. To borrow perpetually was to hasten the ruin of the State, to tax more heavily to overwhelm those whom the king wished to relieve, anticipations of the revenue had already been too frequent, and to economy there was a limit.

<sup>1</sup> Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*, vol. i. p. 192.



What remained? Abuses. "Yes, Gentlemen, in the abuses of privilege lies a mine of wealth on which the State has a right to call"—words which one might expect from a Lafayette but not from a minister of a crown which recognised privilege as inherent in its constitution. Finally Calonne implied that the personal loyalty of the Notables towards their sovereign must be judged by their approval or disapproval of his proposals.<sup>1</sup>

To make observations was what the Notables understood as their business, not merely to approve. The revelation of a serious deficit in the annual revenue was a surprise and shock, and the silence of Calonne as to its amount an offence. They left the hall dissatisfied, and entered on the business of the Assembly in no tractable spirit.

The arrangements for the carrying out of this business were as follows: The one hundred and forty-four Notables were divided into seven separate bureaux or committees, presided over by the seven princes of the blood. In the *bureaux* the measures proposed by Calonne were to be discussed, and a vote taken on the "observations" to be made and presented to the king. Calonne had divided his measures into four parts, each of which was to be explained to the Notables in a general meeting, and afterwards discussed in the *bureaux*. Of

<sup>1</sup> Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 198.



these general meetings there were four; that of the 23rd of February, and those of the 12th and 26th of March and 23rd of April. The opinion of the Notables on any matter laid before them was to be decided by a majority of *bureaux*, not of persons, so that the *bureaux* might be in favour of a measure while the majority of the Notables was against it. This method did not increase Calonne's popularity, nor did it secure his end.

The measures they had first to discuss were the institution of Provincial Assemblies, the imposition of a land-tax to be levied on all lands alike instead of the *vingtièmes*<sup>1</sup>—which, though in principle admitting no distinction except in favour of the clergy, admitted many in practice—the paying up of the debts due to the State by the clergy, a diminution of the *taille*, free circulation in grain, and the abolition of the *corvée*.

The last two measures the *bureaux* accepted with little comment. On the first they observed that it was well to maintain social distinctions, and advised that the presidents of the Provincial Assemblies should always be either a prelate or a noble, but to the proposals concerning the debts of the clergy and the land-tax they offered determined opposition. Exemption from taxation dated from the time when the nobles held their land on condition of military

<sup>1</sup> See page 50.

service, and to consent to pay taxes for the land held by the sword of his forefathers, must have seemed to many an aristocrat equal to laying down his birth-right. Others with no claim to birth held tenaciously to the pecuniary gain and social prestige of privilege, while a few, such as La Rochefoucauld, acknowledged that the times had altered, and that the principle of the tax was just, and yet questioned its legality. On one point all were agreed, before consenting to a change so radical the *bureaux* must know the extent of the deficit.

The demand was the more emphatic because of two statements on finance made by Calonne in his opening address—one, that on assuming office in 1783 he had found a deficit of eighty million francs;<sup>1</sup> the other, that since that date the deficit had increased still further. In 1781 Necker had declared a surplus of ten millions, how then, asked the *bureaux*, had this surplus changed in two years to a deficit of eighty, and why and what was the increase since Calonne had taken office? To answer these questions they asked for the accounts. But Calonne had no idea of submitting accounts,<sup>2</sup> which had cost him and his subordinates a year's labour, to an assembly of persons who had no knowledge of

<sup>1</sup> On the surprise this excited see British Museum Pamphlets, R. 32, *De Calonne*.

<sup>2</sup> Calonne, *Requête au roi*, p. 87.

finance. He was however willing to answer any questions which the Notables wished to ask him, and for this purpose he called, on March 2nd, a committee of six representatives from each *bureau*. Over this committee Monsieur presided, and before it Calonne made a brilliant, good-tempered speech,<sup>1</sup> which won the admiration even of his enemies, but did not satisfy the committee. Six years ago the *Compte rendu* had been received as a favour granted by the sovereign, now the Archbishop of Bordeaux demanded a similar statement as a right. Nor was this all. In discussing finance Calonne asserted, in accordance with the old regime, that the right of imposing taxation lay with the king alone; this the Archbishop of Narbonne denied, and from the clergy came the first definite assertion of the powers of the States-General. "The public need alone," said Narbonne, "justifies taxation"; while the Archbishop of Aix added that "only the States-General dare take the responsibility of adding to the already enormous weight of taxation."<sup>2</sup>

This demand for the States-General from the nobler spirits in the assembly instead of ready response to a principle of taxation so equitable as that now proposed is at first sight puzzling. But

<sup>1</sup> Besenval, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> Weber, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 161.



it was the arbitrary element in the enactment which such men resented. They did not choose to have the order of centuries upset by a minister who found himself in difficulties and used the good-heartedness of his sovereign to exact sacrifices from whole bodies of his fellow-subjects. The clergy, for example, declared themselves ready to pay what the State required, but as it had always been their privilege to pay such contributions as a free gift they refused to yield that privilege at the bidding of Calonne.

Calonne's committee was not a success, and from it he appealed directly to the king, who next day sent a message to the Notables informing them that the tax on land was a matter already decided and reminding them that their advice was desired on the *form* in which taxation could be best imposed, not on the question of its necessity or amount.<sup>1</sup> The answer was ready, "Not this Assembly, august though it be, not the parlements, not the States of the *Pays d'États*, not the king himself has power to authorise so important a change as that implied by the new tax on land."<sup>2</sup> So said Castillon, a Notable from the parlement of Aix, emphasising the words of the Archbishops of Narbonne and of Arles, and casting aside as a quibble the question of the "form" of

<sup>1</sup> Chérest, *La chute de l'ancien régime*, vol. i. p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> Droz, *Le règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 482.



taxation. Paris saw the dilemma in which the king and his Notables stood, and laughed.

“Mes chers amis et bonnes bêtes,  
Coqs, canards, poulets et dindons.

. . . . .  
Le plus hardi de mes valets,  
Qu'un grand amour du bien domine,  
M'apprend que le ciel vous a faits  
Pour ma gloire et pour ma cuisine.  
Je prétends donc vous croquer tous ;  
Tel est mon petit manifeste,  
Sur la sauce décidez-vous . . .  
Mon cuisinier fera le reste.”<sup>1</sup>

On the 12th of March, a fortnight after the opening of the Assembly, the second general meeting was held, when Calonne read his proposals for lightening the *gabelle*, and abolishing internal Customs duties. On that occasion he chose to ignore the attitude assumed by the Notables, and declared the king gratified by the agreement of their sentiments with his own, while almost immediately afterwards he circulated a pamphlet containing the proceedings of the two first general meetings, that the people might see what, *but for the Notables*, the king was ready to do.<sup>2</sup>

Naturally the Notables were indignant. On the one hand they repudiated the idea of being in

<sup>1</sup> Cherest, *La chute de l'ancien régime*, vol. i. p. 164, quoted from *Annales françaises*, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Besenval, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 220.

accord with the crown, and on the other they accused the minister of treachery to his country in thus arraigning the king's servants before his people. They petitioned Louis to order Calonne's offending speech to be printed and sent to them for revision, and at the same time demanded permission to print their deliberations in the *bureaux*, and to circulate these also throughout the country. The proposals of March the 12th, and of those which followed on the 26th regarding the alienation and sale for public benefit of part of the crown lands, received but scant attention, and it soon became apparent that until the quarrel was settled by the dismissal of Calonne the very object for which the Notables were summoned would be neglected.

The king would fain keep the Controller-General. He was not pleased with his Notables, who had by no means realised the golden vision that had kept sleep from his eyes, but he felt the inconvenience of the unpopularity of Calonne and was uncomfortable, and once more he wavered. "M. de Calonne's pamphlet was not intended to annoy you ; deliberate according to your conscience,"<sup>1</sup> said Louis to the Duc de Bourbon, president of the fifth *bureau*. The remark was hardly consistent with whole-hearted support of his minister, and the

<sup>1</sup> Besenval, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 222.

queen and clergy were known to be in opposition, and the discontented members of the magistracy to meet at the house of the Keeper of the Seals! Nothing was wanted for the fall of the minister but an occasion, and this was furnished by his dispute with Necker.

The dispute turned finally on an assertion made by Calonne to the effect that, instead of finding a surplus, Necker's successor in the Finance had not sufficient money to pay the expenses of the current year and to leave enough on hand with which to begin the next. Necker was popular, and the assertion roused indignation. To settle the point, and in the hope of incriminating Calonne, M. de Fleury was appealed to. He denied the accusation, and Calonne wrote him an angry letter. For answer Fleury repeated the denial, and sent Miromesnil a copy of his reply. This Miromesnil carried to the king, who at once demanded an explanation from Calonne. In his turn Calonne resorted to abuse of his colleague, characterising Miromesnil as a minister in whom the Notables, the parlements, in fact the whole opposition, found their chief support,<sup>1</sup> and for proof of his accusation advised the king to apply to the *Poste aux Lettres* for specimens of the correspondence of his Keeper of the Seals. This Louis did,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Droz, *Le règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 502.

<sup>2</sup> Cherest, *La chute de l'ancien régime*, vol. i. p. 194.

and on April the 8th Miromesnil was succeeded by M. de Lamoignon.

Had Calonne rested satisfied with the dismissal of Miromesnil he might have gained the king, but when he asked also for the removal of Breteuil he brought about his own ruin. That minister had been ambassador at Vienna, and high in favour with Maria-Theresa; he had returned to France a partisan of Austria, and was too secure in the favour of the queen to be lightly dismissed. Before answering Calonne's demand, Louis turned to Marie-Antoinette.

If we may trust the gossip of the day, Marie-Antoinette took some trouble before giving her advice. "It is said," writes Bachaumont, "that the queen tried to find out what were the grievances of the Notables against Calonne, that she questioned several separately, and that all agreed that not Breteuil but the Controller must go."<sup>1</sup> This counsel was in accordance with her own feeling and policy, since the dignity of the throne in her eyes had been compromised by the very assembling of the Notables. On the 9th of April, one day after the dismissal of Miromesnil, it was known that Calonne too had fallen.

"The king," says Bachaumont, "is in great perplexity. He is strangely upset by finding

<sup>1</sup> Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets*, vol. xxxv. p. 15.



himself disappointed in the man he had trusted";<sup>1</sup> yet the loss of the minister only increased his difficulties. Calonne's accounts were not ready to be handed over to his successor, and he remained at Versailles drawing up statements and fêting the new ministers,<sup>2</sup> and the malcontents complained. Montmorin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, urged the recall of Necker, then exiled from Paris because of the persistence with which he had pursued his quarrel with Calonne,<sup>3</sup> while the queen, Breteuil, and the courtiers urged the appointment of Loménie de Brienne.

For the moment neither was chosen, and a certain M. de Fourqueux was appointed Minister of Finance. He was known to possess only average abilities, and for this reason was suggested to the king by the supporters of Brienne—a mere stop-gap until they could secure their own man.

Meantime on the 23rd of April the fourth part of the programme of reform was submitted to the Notables. On this occasion the king was present, and made an important speech. He yielded on the question of accounts, promising to lay them before the Notables, and declared himself resolved not only to wipe off the deficit, but to pre-

<sup>1</sup> Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets*, vol. xxxv. p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. xxxv. p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Weber, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 156.

vent its recurrence. In order to this he began with the usual promise of economies—economies which would be carried “as far as is consistent with the security of the State and the glory of the crown, of which, I well know, the French people are more jealous than I myself can be.” But the king did not pretend that economy was enough: he proposed the stamp act, to fall very lightly on the poor and more heavily on the rich; and he held to “that which costs me most,” the land-tax, already proposed, “the amount and duration of which must be determined by the amount of deficit it has to cover.”<sup>1</sup>

There was uneasiness in the queen’s apartments as to the effect of this speech. Marie-Antoinette, writes Besenval, stood at a window of the château impatient to hear the result of the sitting. In due time the royal carriage rolled into sight, and Monsieur, who was seated by the king, was seen to clap his hands. All had gone well, and Marie-Antoinette’s heart was made so light that for the rest of the day she overwhelmed with attention all the Notables she met, as if to thank them for their goodness to the king. “It must be confessed,” added the quondam courtier, “that there are few instances of such a fault.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 226 seq.

<sup>2</sup> Besenval, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 232.

The relief of the moment was short-lived, for by the end of April the state of the exchequer was such that national bankruptcy seemed inevitable. The king passed to and from his wife's rooms to his own; in the first were gathered the wire-pullers of the palace; in the second, ministers unequal to the crisis. He was unnerved—"so moved and so disturbed by the condition of his kingdom that he even shed tears."<sup>1</sup> The queen suggested Necker's return, but Necker, though acknowledged honest, capable and popular, was overbearing in manner and intolerable to the king. She suggested a plan whereby Necker and Brienne should share the control of finance, but of this the king disapproved, and then she suggested Brienne alone; but Louis, though he believed in the archbishop's capacity, could not bring himself to appoint a man who, holding high office in the church, was reputed to have neither faith towards God nor scruple towards man.

Indecision could not last for ever. Montmorin held faithfully to Necker as the one hope of the country, and with him was Lamoignon, the new Keeper of the Seals. Indeed, so desperate was the state of things that Breteuil was induced to accompany them to the king and listen while Montmorin once again urged Necker's recall.

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*, vol. ii. p. 95 note.



"There is nothing for it then," exclaimed Louis at last, "but Necker." Breteuil noted the tone of unwilling acquiescence. Was not Necker in exile, he suggested, and was it consistent with royal dignity to choose as minister one actually banished from the presence of his sovereign. The king caught at the escape, and, as someone must be chosen, decided on Loménie de Brienne.<sup>1</sup>

The appointment was made on the 1st of May, and Brienne on the same day went to the *bureau* of which he had been a member, and there announced that the economies promised by the king should be forty instead of fifteen million francs. At once, with that unthinking buoyancy so characteristic of France, public opinion grew easy concerning finance. Government bills, a week before mere cumberers of the ground, became easily negotiable, and everyone was ready to lend to the Treasury. On the 7th of May the king confirmed by edict the promise made on the 1st by Brienne, and at the same time ordered a loan of six million francs, which the Parlement at once registered on the strength of the new minister's reputation.

There were, however, signs of uneasiness among the Notables. The accounts had been placed before them, but they were unsatisfactory and tangled documents, and not even with the aid of officials

<sup>1</sup> Droz, *Règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. i. p. 508.



from the Treasury, could they arrive at a clear idea of the amount of the deficit. The deficit as finally determined by them exceeded that of Calonne by some five and twenty million francs. It was clear that economies could not meet it, but the Notables hoped that Brienne, having ousted Calonne, would abandon the late minister's projects and propose others more acceptable.

The edict of the 7th of May shook this hope, for it did not propose the loan as a substitute for the hated land-tax, and a message sent to the *bureaux* destroyed it. In this message the king expressed "the extreme regret with which he had recourse to the land-tax, but trusted to their co-operation in meeting a deficit, *"the amount of which they had themselves declared."*<sup>1</sup>

In reply, the *bureaux* dwelt upon economy and passed lightly over taxation. They thanked the king for fixing his "*first*" economy at forty millions, and for hinting at further retrenchment,<sup>2</sup> while Lafayette in the *bureau* presided over by Artois, demanded a national assembly. "You mean," interrupted the count, "the States-General?" "Yes, sir; the States-General, or something better, if that is possible."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Collection des Edits, Arrêts, etc.*, British Museum, 230 i. 9, "*Ordres envoyés à tous les princes, 7 mai.*"

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, *Arrêt du bureau de M. le comte d'Artois*, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Lafayette *Mémoires et correspondances*, vol. ii. p. 177.

Another week passed and Brienne showed no sign of departing from the policy of his predecessor. The Notables were indignant at seeing him adopt the very scheme of the man he had succeeded, and would do nothing. And while Brienne displeased the Notables, they in their turn displeased the king. The bulk of them were indifferent. The reformers cried for the States-General and National Assemblies. The interested saw the king make sacrifices but refused to follow his example. On May the 25th, with a heavy heart, Louis met the Notables for the purpose of closing the Assembly and dismissing "those best qualified to give him advice."

"I have told you," he said, "of abuses and you have unveiled them without disguise. Nothing shall be wanting on my part to restore order; by stating the amount of the deficit you have taken the first step towards this, while I have promised economies and recognised the necessity of taxation."<sup>1</sup> The Keeper of the Seals and the Controller were more apologetic. "The sacrifices to which the king must for as short a time as possible submit the nation will not exhaust a kingdom so rich in resources—in the fertility of its soil, in the industry of its people, in the personal virtues of its sovereign," said Lamoignon. "You have yourselves shown a

<sup>1</sup> *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 226. *Discours du roi.*

deficit of a hundred and forty millions, and a fresh tax is a necessity. But economies are begun—the king, queen, and princes are ready to make sacrifices—a statement of accounts will be published at the end of the year, and a council of finance will distribute the public funds between the different departments, with such guarantees the additional taxation cannot be too burdensome,” added Brienne.

There was no attempt at flattery in the replies made by Monsieur as first subject of the crown, by the Archbishop of Narbonne, as representing the clergy, and by the First President of the Parlement of Paris.

Monsieur was polite and colourless; Narbonne, while declaring the willingness of the clergy to contribute to the revenue, reserved the right of contributing in the old form, *i.e.* as a free gift. “We claim the maintenance of our forms,” he said, “because they belong to the constitution of the monarchy, and because they as well as our property are under the guardianship of the laws and the special protection of Your Majesty.” There was little pliability here, and there was even less in the words of the First President of the Parlement, “The Notables have seen with alarm the extent of the evil which exists. A prudent administration must now reassure the nation and prevent the disasters which your Parlement has more than

once predicted. . . . A respectful silence is our part."<sup>1</sup>

Little wonder if the king was disheartened and the queen annoyed. The conduct of the Notables had not rendered deliberative assemblies more pleasing in the eyes of royalty, and the summoning of the States-General was now as unacceptable to the king as the summoning of the Notables had been welcome.

<sup>1</sup>For speeches see Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 226 *seq.*



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE PARLEMENTS.



D'EPRESMESNIL.

“THE present time is that of a new order which I shall uphold for my own honour and for the happiness of my people,”<sup>1</sup> wrote Louis in a message sent to his Notables on the 14th of May concerning proposals made by the *bureaux* for

the better management of finance.

The “new order” meant the undoing of the work of Richelieu and with it of the old regime; but the king did not see this. He did not see that the institution of Provincial Assemblies involved a criticism of the central control such as

<sup>1</sup> *Collection des Edits du Roi*, British Museum, 230 i. 9; *Réponse de S. M. à chaque bureau le 14 mai, 1787.*

Richelieu would not have suffered; that the principle of equal taxation was at variance with the spirit of the old regime, or that by the summoning of the Assembly of Notables he had opened the way to popular government. He believed that the new order was his to uphold, and in this belief dismissed his Notables.

Brienne was not sorry to see the Notables go. "He wished," says Necker, "a free hand," and was already aware that men criticised his actions and questioned his fulfilment of their expectations, for Brienne had the intellect which sparkles but does not fuse, and the vacillation of conduct which results from a contradiction between theory and temperament. "Liberal in political theory," adds Necker, "he was imperious in character."<sup>1</sup>

On taking office the new minister had invited the queen to be present at and take part in the Councils.<sup>2</sup> He knew that she was well disposed towards him, and found her support useful, and he flattered her by pretending to make her opinions prevail. These opinions were often thoughtful and generally clear-sighted;<sup>3</sup> but her policy was not in accord with the times, and even if it had been, her unpopularity would

<sup>1</sup> Necker, *Histoire de la révolution française*, vol. i. p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Nolhac, *La Reine Marie-Antoinette*, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> See La Rocheterie, *Recueil des lettres authentiques de Marie-Antoinette*, for very different tone in the letters of this period from those written to her mother. ●

have destroyed its weight. Brienne did not strengthen the crown by admitting Marie-Antoinette to the king's Councils, nor did he add to her happiness.

Supported by the court party and by the queen, with a set of reforms ready to present to the public, and the free hand he desired, Brienne had an opportunity of inaugurating the new order with some *éclat*. Paris liked a certain show and ceremony in matters of government, and waited now to hear on what day the king would hold a Royal Sitting in its Parlement, and present for registration, one after another, the edicts which should grant Provincial Assemblies, abolition of the *corvée*, modification of the *gabelle*, free circulation of grain within and without the kingdom, a stamp act, and a land-tax which fell on privileged and non-privileged alike. "There would," says Droz, "have been a force about such a roll of edicts which would have made the remonstrance of Parlement on the infringement of privilege and the imposition of the stamp act difficult, and to prevent such remonstrance was important above all things."<sup>1</sup> Paris waited, councillors urged, but the day did not come. Brienne was afraid to risk the whole on one throw, and he allowed the popular enthusiasm, which might have forced Parlement to register the whole, to fritter itself away on successive edicts sent to be registered in

<sup>1</sup> Droz, *Règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. ii. p. 3.

the usual manner. He might have added prestige to the throne, and he only brought on it contempt, for disappointed enthusiasm is hard to bear, and a crown that will venture nothing is not loved. This act of his "was," says the historian, "the greatest mistake of a minister who committed many."<sup>1</sup>

For not only did Brienne lose an opportunity of impressing on France the benefits for which she was indebted to the crown, but he defeated his own ends. Parlement acted as the Notables had done. On the 17th, 22nd, and 27th of June respectively, it registered the edicts on grain, Provincial Assemblies, and the *corvée*; but when, on the 6th of July, those proposing fresh taxation were received, it stopped short and demanded a statement of the receipts and expenses of the kingdom. The new order found itself in conflict with the Parlement as it had been with the Notables; while the Notables, by refusing to sanction these edicts, had, instead of striking a blow at the Parlement, only strengthened its hand; and when the king on the 8th of July refused the accounts, on the ground that such a demand was beyond its powers, Parlement, too, called for the States-General. Messages passed between Paris and Versailles, remonstrances and replies;<sup>2</sup> but neither

<sup>1</sup> Droz, *Règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. ii. p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> See *Collection des Edits*, British Museum, 230 i. 9; *Arrêté du Parlement du 6 juillet, 1787, seq.*, for text of these.



yielded, and on the 6th of August the Supreme Court at Paris was summoned to a *Lit de Justice* at Versailles.

There registration of the edicts was enforced. "It is ever with regret that I decide to avail myself of my full prerogatives," said Louis; "but to-day my Parlement forces me to do so, and the safety of the State, the first of all laws, makes it my duty."<sup>1</sup> To which the First President replied: "If, notwithstanding the representations of your Parlement, your Majesty still thinks it his duty to exercise his absolute power, your Parlement will not cease to use its zeal and to raise its voice with respect, but with firmness, against the taxes, which are in themselves as disastrous as their imposition is illegal."<sup>2</sup>

Next day in the Palais de Justice the two edicts were pronounced null and void, and it was even proposed to forbid the execution of those already registered. So serious a proposal required further discussion, and its decision was postponed for eight days. Meantime preliminary debates were held, and on each occasion the Salle des Pas Perdus was thronged with a crowd more curious and noisy than influential. The idle and the turbulent were there, eager to ply the councillors, as they issued

<sup>1</sup> Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 244.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*, vol. i. p. 246, Procès-verbal du Lit de Justice du 6 août, 1787.

from the *Grand' Chambre* with questions which, by their oath of office, they were bound not to answer—an oath respected by few, and the observance of which cost the Archbishop of Paris insult.

Here, again, it is strange to find the populace in opposition to a proposal for more equitable taxation. But it must be remembered that the question had come to be whether the right of imposing new taxes lay with the crown or with the nation. The Parliament had given its voice for the nation, it had thrown the ultimate authority on the States-General, and here lay its popularity. The upholding of a “new” or, indeed, any order by Louis XVI. grew more and more precarious.

The discussions at the Palais de Justice were watched at Versailles with anxiety. Brienne at first was hopeful, and assured the queen that the meeting on the 13th of August would be submissive, and Marie-Antoinette repeated the hopeful words to the courtiers who crowded about her. Meantime the discussions going on in Paris showed no symptom of submission, and Brienne proposed to exile the Parlement, for Versailles had a profound belief in the efficacy of distance from the capital in reducing revolutionary councillors to meek and loyal subjects.

But Malesherbes—he who had been the colleague and friend of Turgot—once more sat in the king’s Council, and urged delay. And the king, anxious if

possible to conciliate, published on the 9th of August a list of economies he had ordered in the royal household.<sup>1</sup> Mercy attributes the credit of these reforms to Marie-Antoinette, but they brought little satisfaction either to her or to the king. Both she and Louis regretted the privations caused by the reforms, and the loss of servants whose zeal they had proved,<sup>2</sup> and when openly attacked by the Duc de Coigny, Grand Master of the *Petite Écurie*, on the loss of his post, the king showed no rancour. "We came to high words, M. de Coigny and I, but had he struck me I should have pardoned him."<sup>3</sup> The queen was even more unhappy. She was reproached at court because of the retrenchments,<sup>4</sup> and held responsible by Parlement for much of the profusion of Calonne, and so strong was the public feeling against her that the Lieutenant of Police advised the king not to allow her to appear in the streets of Paris.

Meantime the publication of the reforms in the royal households had had no effect whatever in softening the Parlement. The sitting held on the 13th persisted in regarding the edicts registered in the *Lit de Justice* of the 6th as null and void, and

<sup>1</sup> *Louis XVI. Édits*, British Museum, 27, d. 14; *Règlement du roi sur quelques dépenses de sa maison et celle de la reine*.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>3</sup> Besenval, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 256.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, vol. ii. p. 260.



in demanding the States-General,<sup>1</sup> and on the 15th the threat of exile was carried out, and the Parlement banished to Troyes.

The banishment of the Parlement of Paris to Troyes was a very different thing from the exile which took place in 1771 under Louis XV. Then the magistrates were scattered and deprived of office, now they were only "translated," and translated in a body. On the 22nd of August they met at Troyes, as in Paris, in *Chambres assemblées*, and registered the letters patent which had ordered their "translation." The Parlement of Paris still existed, and was no small power in its exile. Deputations from the other great Courts of Paris, the *Cour des Aides*, the *Chatelet*, from the University and other bodies, hastened after it with sympathetic and laudatory addresses; deputations poured in also from the provinces and their parlements.<sup>2</sup> "Never was a sovereign returning from conquest greeted with more high-sounding or enthusiastic words."<sup>3</sup>

The difficulties of the government were not confined to the struggle with the Parlement of Paris. On the 17th of June the edict instituting Provincial Assemblies had been registered at the Palais de

<sup>1</sup> *Collection des Édits du Roi*, British Museum, 230, i. 9., *Arrêté du Parlement du lundi, 13 août, 1787*.

<sup>2</sup> For these addresses. see British Museum Pamphlets, F.R., 3-7, *Parlements*, ii., and *Collection des Édits*, 230 i. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Chérest, *La chute de l'ancien régime*, p. 308.



Justice, and had thereafter been sent for local registration to the parlements in the provinces. Of the seven parlements which the edict affected those of Bordeaux, Besançon, and Grenoble resisted registration.<sup>1</sup> There was a feeling that although appearing advantageous to the people these new bodies had for their real object only the exaction and increase of the taxes; there was uncertainty also as to their method of working. The parlements were asked to register the edicts instituting Provincial Assemblies in their districts without being told the special regulations for each Assembly, and they objected. "We do not know the conditions required nor the functions allotted to them," said the Parlement of Besançon, and asked instead for a re-establishment of their old *États*. So determined was Bordeaux in its opposition that its parlement, like that of Paris, was exiled and the edict registered by military force.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately there was neither united action nor paramount authority in the royal Councils. "The king, very jealous of the authority of which he makes so little use,"<sup>3</sup> would neither entrust it to his minister nor wield it himself. "Undecided between

<sup>1</sup> The parlements of Paris, Rouen, Nancy, and Metz were favourable to Provincial Assemblies. The six others belonged to *Pays d'États*.

<sup>2</sup> See Lavergne, *Les assemblées provinciales sous Louis XVI.*

<sup>3</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*, vol. ii. p. 112.

the opinions of his different ministers, who all contradicted each other, he did not know on what course to determine.”<sup>1</sup> The situation was impossible, and Brienne persuaded the queen to secure for him the position and title of *Principal* Minister, since that of *First* Minister the king had said no man should ever again bear. At this Ségur and Castries, Ministers of War and of the Marine, resigned; a brother of Brienne succeeded Ségur, and an untried Comte de la Luzerne was placed at the head of the Marine. First Minister of the crown, with creatures of his own in important posts and a banished Parlement, Brienne surely had the free hand he desired.

But the very absence of the Parlement gave it a certain power. The interruption of business which this absence involved was highly inconvenient to the capital, and the demonstrations in favour of the Parlement were a source of uneasiness to Versailles. Brienne soon found that a Parlement at Troyes had its disadvantages. On the other hand many of the younger councillors, who a few weeks before had been ardent supporters of the liberties of parlement, found the inaction which that support entailed very monotonous, and were ready to meet any advance Brienne might make. Unfortunately their number was sufficient to out-vote the men who had more care for the dignity of their cause.

<sup>1</sup> Besenval, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 269.

Now the king had asserted time after time in his messages and speeches to his Notables and Parlement the necessity of the new taxes and his resolution to impose them, and Parlement, as emphatically had declared that it would not register edicts based on a principle of equal taxation. In their desire for compromise Crown and Parlement alike forsook their declarations. Brienne, sacrificing at once the needs of the Treasury and the honour of his sovereign withdrew the objectionable edicts. "It would perhaps be inconvenient to look for help in a new tax,"<sup>1</sup> runs the lame preamble to the edict of the 19th September, "we have therefore decided for the present . . . to seek in the *vingtièmes* those extraordinary funds which are absolutely necessary." The *vingtièmes* then, were to be re-imposed and prolonged in the vaguely expressed hope "that their collection . . . and other means which we have and will employ may suffice for the actual needs." Parlement accepted the compromise and accepted it notwithstanding the proviso that the *vingtièmes* were henceforth to be levied "without distinction or exception of any kind," and it was silent regarding the States-General. It too had sacrificed its dignity.

<sup>1</sup> *Collection des Édits du Roi*, British Museum, 230, i. 10. vol. ii. *Édit du 19 septembre, 1787*, also *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 257.



There was riotous rejoicing in the city when at the end of September the Parlement returned to Paris; illuminations, shouts, denunciations of Calonne, Breteuil, and Madame de Polignac, and a proposal to promenade the streets with a caricature of Marie-Antoinette. But in the minds of thoughtful men there was scorn both of Parlement and crown. "Three days ago, court and parlement were opposed, now both have fallen back from the lines, and the question seems to be which shall retreat farthest."<sup>1</sup>

The "new order" was not being upheld very firmly by the king. Meantime the condition of the Treasury was exercising a steady, irresistible influence on public affairs. The *vingtièmes* even though continued for two years longer were insufficient to meet its needs, and Brienne was forced to borrow. He dreaded asking for one loan after another and he dared not ask at once for all he needed; he therefore decided to ask for a loan to be registered now, but to extend over a period of five years, *before the expiration of which* he proposed the assembling of the States-General. At the same time Malesherbes prepared an edict granting civil rights to Protestants, and by these concessions Brienne hoped to carry his loan. He arranged that the edicts should be registered at a Royal Sitting to be held in the Palais de

<sup>1</sup> British Museum Pamphlets, F.R. 3-7, *Parlements*, vol. ii., *Le Coup Manqué*.



Justice on the 19th of November, a date at which many of the magistrates had not returned from the autumn holiday. Brienne took care that those whom he knew to be friendly had returned, and so anxious was he to secure registration that he is said to have spent twelve hundred thousand francs in buying adherents.<sup>1</sup>

A *Séance royale* differed from a *Lit de justice* in that it was simply an assembly of the Parlement over which the king presided in person, whereas in a *Lit de justice* it was known that the king meant to exercise his prerogative of commanding registration irrespective of the opinion of the Parlement. Unfortunately on this occasion his ministers advised the use of the prerogative at what they chose to call a Royal Sitting, and, further to maintain the prestige of the throne, introduced the edict in words breathing the autocratic spirit of the old regime.

"It is for me alone," said Louis in reference to the States-General, "it is for me alone to judge of the usefulness of these assemblies, and I shall not suffer that what should be expected from my bounty shall be rashly demanded from me."<sup>2</sup>

"The time is come," said Lamoignon, "to confront the demand of the courts (for the States-General)

<sup>1</sup> Chérest, *La chute de l'ancien régime*, vol. i. p. 339.

<sup>2</sup> For speeches see Mavidal et Laurent. *Séance du roi en son Parlement de Paris du 19 novembre, 1777*, vol. ii. p. 264 *seq.*

with the principles of the monarchy. These are, that to the king alone belongs the sovereign power; that to God alone is the king accountable for the exercise of that power; that the tie between the king and the nation is by nature indissoluble; that the interests and duties of king and subjects only strengthen the tie; that it is for the interest of the nation that the prerogatives of its king suffer no change; that the king as sovereign head of the nation is one with it; and that the legislative power resides in the person of the sovereign without dependence on or division with others. Such are the unchanging principles of the French monarchy as they are found in the words of your own *arrêt* of the 20th of March, 1766." Having thus delivered himself, Lamoignon read the edict for the loan and concluded by the announcement that before the five years were over "the king proposed to communicate to the assembled nation all that his beneficence had effected." Speeches from the magistrates followed, in which little was said about the loan and much about a speedy, rather than the promised tardy convocation of the States-General. At length the Chancellor rose and men expected the customary counting of the votes. "The majority was in favour of registration," wrote Marie-Antoinette to her brother Joseph, "but the king presides at parlement as he does at the Council—without being obliged to follow the

majority. Consequently after everyone had given his opinion the king, without having the votes counted, declared that he ordered the registration.”<sup>1</sup>

To Parlement this was a gratuitous insult. There was a murmur of surprise, and the Duc de Chartres, now by the death of his father in 1785, Duc d'Orléans and first prince of the blood, rose to protest. He was irresolute by nature and timid in public-speaking, and his protest was feeble. “Sire,” he stammered, “I pray your Majesty to permit me to lay before you and this court the declaration that I consider this registration illegal.” “It does not matter,” replied Louis, hesitating in his turn, “the registration is legal since I will it.”<sup>2</sup> An abler defence of the privilege of Parlement than that of Orléans was made by the Abbé Sabatier and Fréteau de St. Just, two of its most noted councillors, and Parlement which had met prepared to register both edicts without remonstrance now refused to acknowledge either.<sup>3</sup> It was thus that Brienne preserved the dignity of his sovereign. And the crown increased the irritation of Parlement by arresting Sabatier and St. Just next day as they sat

<sup>1</sup> La Rocheterie, *Recueil des lettres authentiques de Marie-Antoinette*, vol. ii. p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> Chérest, *La chute de l'ancien regime*, vol. i. p. 357.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*.



on their council-benches, and by banishing Orléans to his castle at Raincy fifteen miles from Paris.

A contemporary pamphlet in which Louis is represented as reviewing his reign, indicates the feeling in Paris regarding him at this crisis. "At my accession I was well-intentioned, and chose Maurepas for my mentor. With Necker I gained virtue, genius, ambition, but I dismissed him. Now I have lost Maurepas and Vergennes, and my happiness has fled. . . . I have Brienne and Lamoignon, and am overwhelmed with trouble. The exile to Troyes! this loan of 450 millions! I dare not think of them! The first Prince of the Blood and two Councillors exiled, imprisoned for having spoken in my presence! To what can it be likened?"<sup>1</sup>

Meantime, in December, Brienne fell ill, and as he lay in bed had time to think. The subject of his meditations was the troublesomeness of parlements. They were indeed very troublesome, and hampered him on every side. The Paris Parlement had declared illegal, either in essence or in form, every measure he had taken to relieve the Treasury, and now the provincial parlements again followed suit. Several of them objected to the prolongation of the *vingtième* which that of Normandy characterised as

<sup>1</sup> British Museum Pamphlets, F.R. 116, *Louis XVI.*, vol. i., *Reflexions et resolutions d'un bon roi.*



equivalent to a new tax.<sup>1</sup> In January the Parlement of Paris declared *lettres-de-cachets* illegal, while in March it denied that the sovereign's will alone could make an edict law, and demanded the recall of the three offending members, "not as a prince of the blood, not as magistrates of the Parlement, but in the name of the laws and of reason, as French subjects and as men."<sup>2</sup> A little later, on the 29th of April, it raised difficulties on the point it had conceded at Troyes—the collecting of the *vingtièmes* on an equitable basis.<sup>3</sup>

Brienne had, as he believed, silenced for at least five years, the cry for the States-General, during which he hoped so to reorganise finance that the cry would not again be raised. In this hope he had obtained the king's consent to the promise. But in order to realise the hope he must be freed from the trammels of the Parlement; he therefore, with the help of Lamoignon employed the long weeks of enforced retirement in thinking out a plan which would "at one blow rob the most dearly cherished institutions of the realm of the prerogatives they had enjoyed for centuries"<sup>4</sup>—in other words, would take from the parlements the power of registering the laws.

<sup>1</sup> British Museum Pamphlets, F.R. 116, *Louis XVI.*, vol. i., *Extraits des registres de la cour du parlement de Normandie*, 20 Dec., 1787."

<sup>2</sup> *Remontrances du Parlement du 11 mars*, 1788.

<sup>3</sup> Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 273.

<sup>4</sup> Necker, *Histoire de la révolution française*, vol. i. p. 25.

"We are," says Marie-Antoinette, writing to the Emperor on the 24th of April, 1788, "on the point of making great changes in the parlements. We think of restricting them to the functions of judges, and of forming another body which shall have the duty of registering the laws of the realm."<sup>1</sup>

This new body was to be called a *Cour-plénière* and was to consist of the princes of the blood, the peers of the realm, the grand officers of the crown, two archbishops, two bishops, two marshals, and two governors of a province, six councillors of state, and four masters of request, the whole of the *Grand'Chambre* of the Parlement of Paris, two members from the *Cour des Comptes*, and two from the *Cour des Aides*, and one member from each of the provincial parlements.<sup>2</sup>

It is impossible that Brienne could suppose his scheme would be popular, and accordingly we find him endeavouring to keep it entirely secret until the day when it was to be sprung on Paris and the

<sup>1</sup> La Rocheterie, *Recueil des lettres authentiques de Marie-Antoinette*, vol. ii. p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires, Édit du roi*, 8 mai, vol. i. p. 312.

*Cour des Comptes.* The *Cour des Comptes* were thirteen in number, and were established in 1464 to have jurisdiction over disputes of finance as the Parlements had over those of justice.

*Cour des Aides.* A court which settled matters regarding the *aides*, that is, subsidies which vassals, whether gentlemen or peasants, had to pay to their *seigneurs*.

provinces alike. The effort defeated its own purpose. Men worked night and day in the royal printing-office at Versailles, and sentinels guarded the doors lest any one should issue. Intendants and governors of provinces visiting the capital were sent back to their posts, and couriers were known to leave Versailles with sealed packets. There was uneasiness in the Palais de Justice ; magistrates were on the alert, and meetings were held in the house of a certain M. Adrien Duport, at which Sabatier and St. Just, now returned from exile, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, Lafayette, and that keen defender of the rights of parlement, d'Éprémesnil, were constantly present.

There, on the evening of May the 2nd, a young councillor, Goëslard de Montsabert, read a copy of Brienne's scheme thrown from a window of the printing-office by one of the carefully-guarded workmen.

Next day the scheme was explained to the Parlement, and d'Éprémesnil followed the explanation by a statement of what he declared to be the fundamental rights of France. This statement recognised the right of the reigning house and its heirs to the throne, but it insisted on the particular privileges of the provinces, on the independent position of judges, the right of the citizen not to be arrested except for trial before proper judges, the right of the provincial parlements to examine the edicts proposed



for their provinces before registering, and the right of the nation to grant subsidies by means of the States-General called together at regular intervals.

An order was issued to arrest d'Éprémesnil and the young councillor Goëslard de Montsabert, the first because of his declaration of rights, the second because his was the speech regarding the *vingtièmes*. The officers of the crown sought them in their houses, but they were on their guard and evaded the order, and next day, May 6th, took refuge in the Palais de Justice, where the peers as well as the magistrates at once assembled and declared MM. d'Éprémesnil and Montsabert under the protection of the king and his laws. The First President, accompanied by a deputation, was sent to Versailles with a remonstrance, and the magistrates resolved to remain where they were until its return.

Midnight came, but not the deputation; crowds had as usual invaded the palace, and it became known in the Grand'-chambre that the Gardes-Françaises had quietly filled the outer court and stair, and the sentinels stood at every exit. Presently the Marquis d'Agoult, their commander, requested to be admitted as bearer of orders from the king to arrest in the Grand'-chambre itself, or wherever they might be found, MM. d'Éprémesnil and Montsabert. "The court will deliberate on the order according to the usual



form," was the reply. "Gentlemen, I know nothing of your forms," said d'Agoult, "the orders of the king must be obeyed without delay," and he commanded the court to point out to him the delinquents. "M. d'Agoult," replied the Duc de Praslin,<sup>1</sup> "when one undertakes orders such as yours, one should see that they are precise. You do not suppose we shall deliver up two members of our own court; if *you* do not know them it is not for us to point them out." D'Agoult sullenly repeated his demand, and had for answer a shout from the whole assembly, "We are all d'Eprémessnils and Montsaberts." Discomfited, the officer retired to seek greater "precision" in those orders of his; and the magistrates sat on.

It was now half-past two in the morning, and at three the deputation returned from Versailles. The Parlement had neglected the formalities regarding an audience, and the ministers had refused it access to the king. Morning came, and with it *lettres-de-cachet*, dated the previous night, forbidding the attendance of the peers in the Palais de Justice. The peers read the letters and sat still. At eleven d'Agoult returned. Three times he summoned the offending members to declare themselves, but silence was his only answer. In despair he called a certain

<sup>1</sup> British Museum Pamphlets, F.R. 6, *Parlements*, vol. iv., *Histoire du siège du Palais par le C— d'Agoult*, etc.

M. Larchier, an official of the court, and ordered him to point out the offending members, but M. Larchier could not see either M. d'Eprémesnil or M. de Montsabert. In vain the captain threatened and stormed. M. Larchier's sight was poor that day, and once more d'Agoult retired for further orders. It was but for a moment. The scene was losing the dignity befitting the occasion. D'Agoult was recalled, and d'Eprémesnil, rising in his place, turned to the officer and said: "You have witnessed the generosity of M. Larchier. I cannot expose him to danger. Have you orders to arrest me by force?" "I have." "When you attempt to use them," said the councillor, "I shall decide on my course." "Call in the soldiers," said d'Agoult. "It is enough," answered d'Eprémesnil; "not to desecrate the Hall of Justice, I submit." Montsabert followed his example, and the magistrates, having resolved to present to the king a faithful account of the whole proceedings, broke up the sitting.

The opposition to Brienne's scheme, intimated in d'Eprémesnil's "declaration of rights" did not deter that minister from persevering in the course he had determined on. The night of the 6th of May, "the frightful night when power hid herself in darkness to surprise and discourage virtue,"<sup>1</sup> was followed by

<sup>1</sup> British Museum Pamphlets, F.R. 6, *Parlements*, vol. iv., *Histoire du siège du Palais par le C— d'Agoult*, etc.

a *Lit de Justice* held on May the 8th. The speech with which the king opened the proceedings was short and menacing. "For the last year his Parlement of Paris had given him much trouble. Not only had it signified that the opinion of each one of its members was as important as that of royalty, but it had dared to insist that a free registration was necessary to confirm what the royal will determined, and in this pretension the provincial parlements had supported that of Paris. Parlements were therefore condemned as unfitted to secure the execution of laws, not only good in themselves, but called for by the nation."<sup>1</sup>

There was truth in the charge. Since its recall by Louis XVI. the Parlement of Paris had opposed the reforms of Turgot, had helped to accomplish the fall of Necker, had discouraged the Notables, and had fought successfully against a fairer system of taxation. But in that it resisted what it considered arbitrary legislation and had now demanded the States-General, it was still the darling of the people, and every endeavour against it was dangerous that was not high-handed enough to be entirely successful. Of such endeavour neither the king nor his minister was capable.

<sup>1</sup> Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 294, *Discours du roi à l'ouverture du Lit de Justice tenu à Versailles le 8 mai, 1788.*



The new edicts of Brienne instituted forty-seven new law-courts which took from the parlements almost all their business ; suppressed certain existing courts ; reduced the numbers of the councillors in the parlements ; granted several much-needed reforms in justice, and instituted the *Cour-plénière* which swept from the Parlement of Paris its *Grand'-chambre*, its peers, and its ancient prerogatives—this last being a loss in which all the parlements shared. The old dearly-loved institutions were left high and dry as courts of justice to try such criminal cases as had ecclesiastic or noble for accused, and such civil suits as involved a sum of 20,000 francs.<sup>1</sup> In the old sense of a parlement they were annihilated.

There was instant protest ; the magistrates called from Parlement to the *Cour-plénière* declined the office, but the ministers disregarded their action and summoned them to their new duty next day. From a spirit of loyalty many did attend, but they protested, as they entered and protested as they left the hall. There was no second summons. The peers had assumed a threatening attitude, and for the present Brienne deemed inaction the safest policy.<sup>2</sup>

In the provinces there was greater excitement

<sup>1</sup> Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 294 seq., *Lit de Justice tenu à Versailles le 8 mai, 1788*.

<sup>2</sup> Weber, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 220.



than in the capital. "Never," writes Bertrand de Moleville, "was a *coup d'état* worse planned. . . . Almost all the troops of the kingdom were set in motion, and the people not only saw that they were expected to rise, but also the full amount of force against which they had to measure themselves, and the sight did not alarm them."<sup>1</sup> The twelve provincial parlements refused registration, whereupon the Governors and Intendants of the provinces, escorted by troops, enforced it in the king's name. Force was met by force, and in Brittany, Béarn, Dauphiné, and Provence, the struggle was prolonged. As heretofore the opposition to the crown came from the privileged classes. Riots were excited and supported by the nobles. The country gentlemen of Brittany held meetings in town and village, and addressed the people on the perfidy of the ministers; the nobles declared all those infamous who were willing to accept office under the new administration, and sent one hundred and thirty of their number to carry the declaration to the governor of the province. The Governor forbade their holding further meetings; they disobeyed and drew up a denunciation of the ministers, which they sent to Versailles in charge of a deputation of twelve. The deputies were lodged in the Bastille, where they were allowed the recreation of billiards and the solace of

<sup>1</sup> Moleville, Bertrand de, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 56.

good dinners, while their friends in Brittany despatched by various circuitous routes a larger deputation to demand the liberty of the first.

These doings were but an index of the opposition which had broken out all over France, and in June Brienne called an extraordinary assembly of the clergy, hoping that from them at least he would receive support. An immediate supply of money was his greatest necessity, and this granted he hoped to stave off the evil day of the convocation of the States-General. But instead of sending money to Brienne the clergy sent remonstrances to the king. In the first of these they protested against the edicts of May, and especially against entrusting the registration of all taxes to the new *Cour-plénière*. They insisted on the right of the nation to give its free consent to the imposition of taxes, even if on all other matters it might only remonstrate, and contended that the institution of the *Cour-plénière* destroyed this right, since it was one irresponsible court dependant on the will of the king. Finally they prayed for the assembling of the States-General, dwelling on the usefulness of such assemblies were their meetings only frequent and at regular intervals, and ended with the quiet assertion that nothing remained for the king—the sovereign educated in the proud motto, *L'État, c'est moi*—but to listen to the voice of the nation, and that as

speedily as possible.<sup>1</sup> In these words the clergy—the first order in the state—rang the knell of the old regime. In their second remonstrance, sent to Versailles on the same day, the 15th of June, 1788, the clergy protested against the principle of taxing their property. Their goods, they said, were consecrated to God and could not be used for the State except by free gift. "Their conscience and their honour did not permit them to see an offering, which should only be made from love to their country, turned into a tax paid under compulsion."<sup>2</sup> In short, they treated the principle of taxation as if it alone were the question at issue and left the Archbishop to his own resources.

These were nearly exhausted. On the 13th of July a terrible hail-storm devastated the north of France, ruining the crops in an area of six hundred and fifty square miles.<sup>3</sup> A lottery was opened for the relief of the sufferers, which Brienne found convenient for the relief of the Treasury; he was believed also to have used funds belonging to the department of the *Menus Plaisirs*,<sup>4</sup> funds which M. Papillon de la Ferté had husbanded so carefully, because they never were sufficient for their purposes.

Such mean and miserable resources would not do

<sup>1</sup> Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 374 seq.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. i. p. 378.

<sup>3</sup> Chérest, *La chute de l'ancien régime*, vol. ii. p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> Besenval, *Mémoires*, vol. ii. p. 328.

much for a Treasury whose "credit was gone, whose next year's revenue was anticipated, and whose funds in hand were little over 250,000 francs."<sup>1</sup> Something must be done, and on the 8th of August the king yielded to the cry of the country, and promised an assembly of the States-General which should meet on the 1st of May, 1789.

The contest had ended in the triumph of the parlements, and the "new order" which the king had pledged himself to uphold was soon to pass from his keeping altogether.

<sup>1</sup> Necker, *L'administration de M. Necker par lui-même*, p. 27.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### CONCLUSION.



LOUIS-CHARLES,  
DUC DE NORMANDIE.

THE act of the 8th of August, 1788, stands out as one of supreme importance in the history of France. With the promise that the States-General would meet in May, 1789, ended the first phase in the struggle which finally destroyed the

old regime. Up to this time the conflict had been one between the crown and the privileged classes.

It was not the people who, by refusing one measure of reform after another, slowly forced changes more and more radical on their country ; it was not the people who hurried on the impending ruin, it was the privileged. With marvellous, almost stupid patience, the people submitted to the hardships which the

incapacity of the government imposed on them; they lost spirit; they saw their children die, but they paid their share, and more than their share, into the revenue; and they did not rebel. Henceforth the people were to share in the conflict, and with this fact begins the second phase of the great story—a phase which belongs rather to the rise of the republic and of a new regime than to the fall of the monarchy and of the old. But before leaving the story of the old monarchy it may be well to indicate very briefly the change which had occurred in the attitude of the people—a change towards which the monarchy itself had contributed.

In speaking of the people one is apt to think too exclusively of the peasantry, and to forget that the people, as distinguished from the nobles and clergy, included the middle as well as the lower classes. To the Third Estate belonged the rich *bourgeois* whose income frequently far exceeded that of many a noble, as well as the *menu peuple*, men so low in the social scale that in towns they might not qualify as burgesses, and in the country had no part in the village assemblies. The *menu peuple* were constantly recruited from the peasantry, for bad seasons and unjust assessments brought ruin on many families—it was the dangerous class, to whom nothing mattered, and by whom anything might be dared.

The *bourgeois* or middle class lived almost exclusively in towns. There were, says de Tocqueville, more towns, and especially more small towns, in France than in other European countries,<sup>1</sup> and their inhabitants were occupied either in trade or in business which had to do with the law. "The whole of the *bourgeois* class," adds the same writer, "was more or less closely connected with matters relating to law; . . . the number of those who were either themselves magistrates or occupied in carrying out the decision of magistrates was immense."<sup>2</sup> This was perhaps peculiarly true of the small towns, for in the great cities we find great industries. The manufacturers of Rheims employed thirty thousand workpeople.<sup>3</sup> The cotton looms of the district of Rouen produced an income of fifty million francs,<sup>4</sup> and Sedan boasted her yearly five hundred thousand yards of "fine stuff," costing a little over fifteen shillings a *mètre*.<sup>5</sup> In Lyons, silk was a great if fluctuating industry, while Bordeaux with its wine trade struck the English traveller, Arthur Young, as surpassing in commerce, riches, and magnificence any city in England excepting London.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p. 296.

<sup>3</sup> Lavergne, *Les assemblées provinciales sous Louis XVI.*, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, p. 246.

<sup>5</sup> *Idem*, p. 287.

<sup>6</sup> *Idem*, p. 311.



There were also in the Third Estate the *ouvriers* of France, men who plied their trade either as master or apprentice, and workmen engaged in the manufactures of the country. Neither these men nor the peasantry were untaught. "In 1787," says M. de Lavergne, "the people were better educated than in 1815,"<sup>1</sup> and this they owed to their clergy. There was a village school in most of the parishes of France, the proportion being about eighty schools in every hundred parishes. They were poor little places, with benches only for the youngest children, and narrow windows, round which clustered the pupils and their master; but they resulted in a country population of which half the men and rather less than half the women could read and write.<sup>2</sup> In towns the average was higher, and of Paris a traveller who visited it in 1786 writes: "Every one in Paris reads. In the shops, women, children, workmen, apprentices read. Lackeys standing behind the carriages, coachmen on their boxes read. Everyone, particularly among the women, carries a book."<sup>3</sup>

And if the lower classes of the Third Estate were more or less educated, the upper classes were thoroughly cultured men. "In 1789," writes the

<sup>1</sup> Lavergne, *Les assemblées provinciales sous Louis XVI.*, Introduction, p. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Broc, *La France pendant la révolution*, vol. ii. p. 367 seq.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, vol. ii. p. 374.



Vicomte de Broc, "they had everything except nobility, and that they could buy."<sup>1</sup> This great educated part of the middle class was steadily advancing in wealth, education, and influence, and to it the teaching of the *philosophes* had especially appealed. By it the loans called for by successive ministers of finance were supplied, and this fact alone contributed largely to that growth of public opinion which was so remarkable in the last half of the reign of Louis XVI.

"In old days," says M. Taine, "public affairs were the concern of the king," matters with which the Third Estate had nothing to do.<sup>2</sup> But when the nation was invited to lend the money with which these affairs were carried on, its attitude changed and the "affairs of the king" became also those of his people. Men whose incomes depended on the administration of the government were certain to become critical of that government, while to such criticism the publication of the *Compte rendu* had given a certain sanction.

Now, in one way or another the government of Louis XVI. had irritated each one of the classes comprised in this Third Estate. It had intensely annoyed the rich *bourgeois* by the ordinances of 1783, which excluded him from the army and all

<sup>1</sup> Broc, *La France pendant la révolution*, vol. ii. p. 349.

<sup>2</sup> Taine, *L'ancien régime*, p. 400.

posts in the church higher than that of a parish *curé*. By the edicts of 1788 it had made great changes in the administration of justice, creating new courts and abolishing old ones, and by so doing affecting the position and income of thousands of *bourgeois* families.<sup>1</sup> Turgot, by his edict abolishing the *jurandes* and *maîtrises*,<sup>2</sup> had opened trade to all men to the intense satisfaction of the *ouvriers*, but on his fall the government re-established the old autocratic *jurandes*, and did so in an undecided, indefinite way, which left the artisan's position uncertain and constrained. "The state of discomfort and disorder into which all the lower classes of the towns were thrown, had," says de Tocqueville, "serious consequences as soon as the people reappeared on the political scene."<sup>3</sup> Finally, during these fourteen years of Louis XVI.'s reign, hope of relief had time after time been excited in the peasantry and then taken from them.

De Tocqueville devotes a chapter of his *Ancien régime* to explaining how the very ameliorations in the condition of the people had but tended to discontent, but M. Chérest points out that the discontent was due to expectations unfulfilled, and not to ameliorations achieved. "Men did not yet

<sup>1</sup> Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 296.

<sup>2</sup> See page 182.

<sup>3</sup> Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 295.

know," says M. de Lavergne, writing of July, 1788, "how France hated the old regime."<sup>1</sup>

The direct action of the government helped to reveal this knowledge to France. The king and the ministers, hampered and fretted by the privileged, turned from them to the Third Estate. In March, 1787, when Calonne printed the proceedings of the first and second general meetings of the Notables, he sent a copy to the village *curés* that they might communicate its contents to the people. The proceedings were prefaced by a pamphlet written by a certain M. Gerbier, and it was this pamphlet which had so incensed the Notables against Calonne.<sup>2</sup> In it the writer tells the people that "it is by the reformation of abuses alone that the king wishes to increase the revenues, and, as far as possible, relieve his subjects." Now, if the Notables withstood this reform, whose was the fault if the people were not relieved? The inference was obvious, and the pamphlet was characterised as "a call to insurrection addressed to the Third Estate against the privileged orders."<sup>3</sup>

Again, in July, 1788, Brienne, hurt and disappointed by the refusal of the clergy to grant

<sup>1</sup> Lavergne, *Les assemblées provinciales sous Louis XVI.*, p. 384.

<sup>2</sup> See page 321.

<sup>3</sup> Weber, *Mémoires*, vol. i. p. 165, and Chérest, *Chute de l'ancien régime*, vol. i. p. 182 seq.



him the subsidy he so sorely needed, issued an order by which the king appealed to the Third Estate for counsel—one might almost say for direction. The *arrêt* was, says M. Chérest, “a last attempt to” compel the clergy to a different course, while Droz regards it as an attempt on the part of Brienne to create for himself a party in the Third Estate. In either or in any case, the *arrêt* of July 5th was a strange document, and coming as it did from the Council of the king, was sufficiently significant. It began by referring to the Royal Sitting of November 19th, 1787, at which the king promised the convocation of the States-General within five years,<sup>1</sup> and explained that when the king made this promise he at once instituted research as to the “forms which should precede and accompany the convocation” of the States-General. The result had been unsatisfactory, for nothing had been found in the old documents to guide the government on this point; and “unless the preliminaries are properly carried out, the king fears that the number of the deputies may not be in proportion to the riches and population of each province; . . . that the influence of the different orders may not be duly balanced; . . . that the nation may not be properly

<sup>1</sup> Chassin, *Les élections et les cahiers de Paris en 1789*, vol. i. p. 8; *Arrêt du Conseil d'Etat du roi*, 5 Juillet, 1788.



represented. Were old forms known the king would wish to conform to them, but since they are not, . . . he desires, before coming to any decision, to know the wish of his subjects, so that their confidence may be the greater in an Assembly which is to be a truly national one." He therefore commanded his subjects to aid in research on the old forms, and authorised their sending the results to the provincial assemblies, who were to forward them, with an expression of their own views, to the Keeper of the Seals. There was also a special injunction to the learned men of the "good town of Paris" to help in this research, and report directly to the Keeper of the Seals.

This *arrêt* of the 5th of July was then in startling contrast to the spirit of the old regime. The privileged recognised this, and cried out against it; the *arrêt*, wrote Weber, "is one of the maddest and most disastrous ever issued by a government."<sup>1</sup> The Third Estate recognised it also, and wrote pamphlets. "Every one," continued the same writer, "believed himself called upon to render the States-General 'national,' according to his own fancy, and to regulate, as he thought proper, the proportion of the three estates."<sup>2</sup> The wording of the *arrêt* authorised men to print and circulate their ideas without submission to the censor, with

<sup>1</sup> Weber, *Mémoires*, vol. i. pp. 144-145.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*.

a result full of interest to the historian—an interest, however, which belongs to the second, and not to the first, phase of the conflict with the crown. What is important to note here is that the crown deliberately chose “to follow in the wake of the popular movement rather than to direct it.”<sup>1</sup>✓

At the very time that the government had turned from the privileged to the Third Estate, it had also, by the extension of Provincial Assemblies, awakened in the body of the people a sense of their power and importance. The edict instituting these assemblies was registered by the Parlement of Paris on the 22nd of June, 1787, while the special edicts for the respective provinces were issued in June, July, and August, and the meeting of the Provincial Assemblies fixed for the month of November. The provincial parlements, as it may be remembered, did not all welcome the edicts;<sup>2</sup> but the great extent of country—one-third of the kingdom, which was under the jurisdiction of the Parlement of Paris—offered no resistance, and the Parlements of Rouen, Nancy, and Metz registered without opposition.<sup>3</sup>

In October, meetings were summoned at the parish churches to elect the members of the new

<sup>1</sup> Chérest, *La chute de l'ancien régime*, vol. ii. p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> See page 341.

<sup>3</sup> Lavergne, *Les assemblées provinciales sous Louis XVI.*, p. 107.

*assemblées de paroisse*; every parishioner who paid ten francs of taxation in the year was entitled to a vote, and at these meetings neither the *seigneur* nor the *curé* might be present. The elective principle and the right of the people to choose their representatives without let or hindrance from the privileged were thus acknowledged. In the *assemblées de paroisse* the *seigneur* and *curé* sat by right, thus representing the two higher orders, while three, six, or nine men, as the case might be, sat as representatives of the third or lower order.<sup>1</sup> Above these parish assemblies were the *assemblées d'élections* or *d'arrondissements*, and in them no man might sit who had not been a member of the lower assembly, whether by right, as the *seigneurs* and *curés*, or by election, as chosen at the parish meetings.<sup>2</sup>

The members of the Provincial Assemblies, however, were chosen on a different principle. Half their number were in the first instance appointed directly by the king and these selected the other half, but after three years a fourth of the whole retired and the vacancies were to be filled by the *assemblées d'élections*. Here also the principle of election was admitted, and care was taken that the Third Estate should not be out-voted by the nobles

<sup>1</sup> Lavergne, *Les assemblées provinciales sous Louis XVI.*, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> *Collection des Edits*, British Museum, 230, i. 9, *Règlements pour les assemblées municipales*.



and clergy, its numbers being in every case equal to those of the other two.<sup>1</sup>

Nor was this all. The affairs of the parish, of the district, and of the province were in very great measure entrusted to these assemblies. It was, for example, no longer the collector but the *assemblée de paroisse*, or municipal assembly, as it is often called, which decided the amount of *taille* each man must pay,<sup>2</sup> while to the Provincial Assemblies were entrusted the assessment and distribution of all taxes; the finding funds for and the carrying out of all public works; the decision of disputes which had formerly been settled by the Intendant; and the care of representing the needs and grievances of the province to the king.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, such was the respect shown them by the crown that the king, in presenting Calonne's scheme to the Notables, reserved judgment on several points until the opinion of the Provincial Assemblies could be ascertained.<sup>4</sup>

Thus not only had the importance of the Third Estate been acknowledged by the action of the Crown, but its love of business had been encouraged and its right to a share in the administration of the affairs of the State conceded by the institution of Provincial

<sup>1</sup>Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 240.

<sup>2</sup>Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution*, p. 304.

<sup>3</sup>Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 240.

<sup>4</sup>*Idem*, vol. i. pp. 205, 206.



Assemblies. Administration was in itself no new thing to individual members of the middle class; magistrates, Intendants, even ministers were drawn from that class, but it was new to see a body of men carry on the administration, and to know that they did so in the interests of the people, and not merely in obedience to the orders of the Crown. The point of view had changed, and with it a new sense of power and new hope entered into the life of the nation; and the king, with results for which he was utterly unprepared, was fulfilling the rôle of Saviour of the People. Had not the States-General been promised in a few months' time?

It is an irony of history that the demand for the States-General came from the privileged orders. As long ago as 1771, when the Parlement of Paris had quarrelled with Maupeou, it had asked for the States-General; the demand had been renewed by the Notables, by the parlements, and in no uncertain tones by the Convocation of Clergy, but it had been made in the interest of the upper orders and not in that of the Third Estate. Here and there were clergy and nobles who were zealous for reform, but as a whole the privileged were indifferent to the Third, and had not even learned to believe in it as a power. They recalled the States-General of 1614, where the representatives of the Third were treated

as mere nobodies, and they looked for the same thing to happen again, and only discovered their mistake when retreat was impossible.

The attitude of the privileged towards the Third Estate is well illustrated by the action of the Parlement of Paris. Since the 8th of May there had been no sittings in *Chambres assemblées*, no excited discussions in the Palais de Justice, but an order of Council of September 23rd recalled the parlements to their old functions.<sup>1</sup> Paris was vociferous in her joy, but very soon her Parlement showed what it had meant when it demanded the States-General. Like other public bodies it expressed its opinion on the matters submitted in Brienne's order of July 5th, and it gave its decision in favour of the "forms of 1614." Now these forms required the members of the Third Estate to address the king on their knees, and to wear a costume which should mark them off from their betters,<sup>2</sup> and were altogether out of keeping with the new hopes and aspirations of the people. The decision of the Parlement, therefore, showed it unwilling to grant the representatives of the people more than a mere nominal place in the great assembly of the nation. The joy of the city was changed into indignation, and pamphlet after pamphlet appeared expressing

<sup>1</sup>Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 388.

<sup>2</sup>Droz, *Le règne de Louis XVI.*, vol. ii. p. 84.

the determination of the Third to be no longer treated as cyphers, but as the strength and backbone of the country. "What is the Third Estate?" asked one writer, the Abbé Siéyès, and gave for answer "Everything." Truly the days of the old regime were over, and the revolution had begun.

And how would the king meet the change? Impotent to quell the opposition of the privileged, how would he act when the privileged were themselves opposed? Would he identify himself with the old order, or would he accept and direct the new? It was not in Louis to do either. He had from the first declared the happiness of his people his chief desire, and to this, spite of vacillation and mistake, he had held. He might leave promises unfulfilled, he might permit benefits to be rescinded, but he would not deliberately side with the privileged against justice to the down-trodden—for such a course he had not even the necessary strength of will. As little could Louis frankly adopt the new motto claimed for him by Calonne in his speech at the opening of the Assembly of Notables—"Let others recall the maxim of our monarchy, 'What the king wills the law requires,' the maxim of His Majesty is 'What the happiness of the people requires, the king wills.'"<sup>1</sup> Calonne did not realise the full significance of such a maxim. It was one

<sup>1</sup> Mavidal et Laurent, *Archives Parlementaires*, vol. i. p. 198.



thing to confer benefits, it was a very different thing to accept and direct changes which had their origin in the will of the people and not in that of the king.

For a task so difficult Louis was totally unfit ; he had neither the wide outlook of the statesman nor the firm resolve of the ruler, nor had he the disposition which permitted him to remain content as a figure-head. He had instead the obstinacy of weakness, and the tenacity of one who secretly questions his fitness for his post and he clung to the old autocratic authority without which he could neither understand himself nor anything else.

Maria-Theresa, the Comte de Mercy, and Joseph II. had from the first recognised the disabilities of the king, and it was in the interests of the French monarchy as well as in those of Austria that they urged Marie-Antoinette to keep herself informed on political matters, for unless the queen could bridge over difficulties Maria-Theresa foresaw catastrophe. The queen, alas ! did not bridge over difficulties. She alienated the older and graver nobility, and earned for herself a reputation for extravagance and frivolity ; a reputation which the affair of the diamond necklace, with all the strong party feeling it excited, impressed upon the mind of the public. And it was in May, 1788, not quite a year after the trial of the Cardinal, that Marie-



Antoinette was admitted to the Council. The public believed her influence there much greater than it really was,<sup>1</sup> and was ready to fasten on her the odium of every unpopular measure—the very fact that the queen had a part in the government being in itself an offence.

It was unfortunate that during all the early years of the reign Marie-Antoinette had never approached the subject of politics except in the interests of Austria. This now reacted on her influence in two directions. It had prejudiced the public and it had prejudiced the king—"Half the people," she herself wrote, "is persuaded that I send thousands to Austria."<sup>2</sup> While of her relation towards her husband she says, "Whatever may be said, or whatever may happen, I am never anything but second, and notwithstanding the confidence of the first, he often makes me well aware of this."<sup>3</sup> The narrow intellect of Louis had been trained by the precepts of his father, of his tutor, and of Madame Adélaïde to resist if not to resent the influence of an Austrian wife, and Marie-Antoinette's advocacy of Austrian schemes had intensified her husband's reserve.

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*, vol. ii. p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. ii. p. 225 n.

<sup>3</sup> Rocheterie, *Recueil des lettres authentiques de Marie-Antoinette*, vol. ii. p. 123.

It had tended also to prevent his taking any trouble whatever to interest her in the politics of France. Hampered by her ignorance, her political creed, and her past conduct, the queen as little as the king was fitted to meet the new regime. "One cannot express," writes Mercy in August, 1788, "the resentment of the public against this august princess."<sup>1</sup> "I am very unhappy";<sup>2</sup> she herself says, "it is my fate to bring misfortune."<sup>3</sup>

Misfortune was very near. In a year's time the king and queen were driven from Versailles; in three more they found themselves prisoners in their own capital, and France declared a republic. But in misfortune there was a hidden good. Had the story of their lives ended on the day on which Louis signed the order which promised the States-General and set the seal to his own fate and that of the monarchy, neither he nor Marie-Antoinette would have held the place in history they now hold. But it was revolution and not monarchy which developed their finer qualities. "Oh God, we are too young to reign!" they had exclaimed fifteen years ago, and the pitiful impotence of the cry found an echo in their whole career.

<sup>1</sup> Mercy, *Correspondance secrète entre le comte de Mercy et le prince de Kaunitz*, vol. ii. p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, vol. ii. p. 198.

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